

FAME & FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

**A YOUNG GOLD KING;
OR, THE TREASURE OF THE SECRET CAVES.**

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"Behold the treasure of the secret caves!" said Titania, as the three natives, in obedience to her command, removed basket after basket full of golden coin from the stone shelf and displayed them before the astonished eyes of the boy.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

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A Young Gold King

OR,

THE TREASURE OF THE SECRET CAVES

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

BOUND FOR THE ANTIPODES.

"All hands aloft! Make sail!" roared the chief mate of the Golden Fleece from the deck. "Shake out those reefs! Be lively, my bullies! Set stu'n's'ls! Sheet home!"

The jaunty-looking American clipper, bound from San Francisco to Melbourne, Australia, was well over the bar.

The tug had cast off and was coming around on her return trip, leaving a creamy-white semicircle of foam in her wake.

Captain Rockwell, his daughter Nellie, a bright-eyed miss of sixteen, and Richard Savage, a sprucely-dressed but sickly-looking youth of eighteen, the only son of one of the owners of the vessel, were standing at the taffrail waving their adieus to Mr. and Mrs. Savage and the men on the tug.

Astern lay the "Heads," the entrance to the Golden Gate, whence they had come, while to the leeward stretched the coast of California, a long, shelving beach of white sand.

Seaward the ocean lay like a sheet of sparkling gold in the light of the setting sun.

A solitary fishing smack, an Italian craft, bound inward, was crossing the yellow pathway, and her sail, flaunting in the sun's face, looked like a blood-red banner.

The peculiar cry of the seagulls, wheeling lazily around the vessel, seemed like a kind of bon-voyage to those bound for the far south Pacific.

"Well, Miss Nellie, we're off at last," said Richard Savage, as the tug lengthened her distance from the sailing

craft. "It will be some months before either of us set our eyes again upon the golden shores of California. Do you feel homesick at leaving San Francisco, the place where you were born and lived all your life?"

"A little bit, Mr. Savage," replied the girl.

"Oh, don't call me Mr. Savage. Call me Richard," said the boy, impatiently. "All the girls call me that, while the boys call me Dick."

"But I hardly know you well enough yet to call you by your first name. Besides, you are the son of one of the owners, and——"

"Never mind who I'm the son of. As to not knowing me well enough, why, we are going to be together for months and are soon bound to be very well acquainted."

"Aren't you homesick yourself?" she asked.

"Me? Not a bit of it. 'Frisco is a jolly town, I know, and I'm leaving a whole lot of fellows and girls behind, but the family sawbones said I was living at too rapid a pace, burning the midnight oil, after a fashion, and my health was so run down that if my people didn't want to plant me in Lone Mountain they'd better send me on a long sea voyage, so here I am, bound for the antipodes."

"You don't look very well, that's true, but papa says you'll soon pick up."

"Sure, I will, especially in such charming company as yourself," and Richard Savage cast an admiring glance at the captain's pretty daughter.

Nellie Rockwell blushed a little under his ardent gaze and turned her face toward the fast receding tug.

Richard Savage smiled complacently.

Although socially a considerable distance above Miss

Rockwell, he admired the girl on account of her good looks and winning ways.

His garments were of the best quality and of a fashionable cut.

He sported a gold watch and chain, with a diamond-studded pendant, and wore a diamond ornament in his necktie.

In the captain's safe was a draft made out in his name for a fat amount on a Melbourne banker, which he was at liberty to spend in having a good time while the vessel was discharging her cargo and taking aboard another at the colonial capital.

Finally, he was good-looking, and thought a whole lot of himself.

Such was Richard Savage, the only and rather self-willed son of the wealthy senior partner of the shipping firm that owned the Golden Fleece.

Being accustomed to lord it over the servants of the family mansion; over his parents, especially his mother, and over all his friends and acquaintances who would stand for it, and most of them did, he expected to boss things aboard the Golden Fleece as far as he chose to exercise that privilege.

His father practically owned the vessel, so he expected all hands from the captain down would take their hats off to him, so to speak.

If they failed to treat him with the respect and consideration he looked for, he made up his mind that there would be something doing when the ship got back to San Francisco.

Such were his thoughts when he boarded the vessel in the stream, with his father and mother, before she lifted anchor.

Then he was introduced to Nellie Rockwell.

He was immensely taken with her, and decided that he would monopolize her society during the voyage.

He expected her to appreciate the fact of being on intimate terms with a young gentleman of his advantages, and that she would devote herself wholly to his entertainment.

At the same time he found himself making a strong bid for her favor, as he was anxious to stand well with her, and was prepared to make certain concessions, if necessary, in order to do it.

The sky was now aglow with the last rays of the sun fast vanishing below the far-off sea line.

The Golden Fleece, with every sail spread to the light breeze, was eating her way, as it were, through the golden shaft of fire that shot across the waves.

The ship's bell forward slowly struck four times.

The seaman, whose trick at the wheel had now expired, glanced expectantly forward.

In a moment or two a stalwart, fine-looking lad, in the usual rig of a foremast hand at sea, sprang up the ladder leading to the poop, and walked briskly aft to relieve the old weather-beaten seadog at the wheel.

Captain Rockwell had already gone below.

The steward, a mulatto, popped his head up the companion-way fronting the brass-hooded binnacle and announced to the young people at the taffrail that supper was on the table.

This was a signal for Nellie and Richard to turn around and leave the rail.

"Why, Jack!" cried the girl, in a tone of pleasant surprise, as her eyes rested on the boy who had just taken charge of the wheel. "I did not notice you before. How long have you been at the wheel?"

"Not more than a minute, Nellie," he answered, with a cheerful smile.

"Well, I'm awfully glad to see you. Isn't it funny that I should be aboard the ship with papa?"

"It's rather unusual to have a lady passenger, I'll admit, but I'm bound to say that you're as welcome as the flowers in May."

"Upon my word, you said that very nicely, Jack," laughed the girl. "You are certainly improving."

"Am I?" laughed the boy. "I'm glad to hear it."

"You are, indeed. We'll see a good deal of each other now, won't we?"

"I have no doubt we will."

"Aren't you glad?" she asked, coquettishly.

"You need hardly ask that question; but you must remember that I'm not my own master now, as I was ashore. We can only meet occasionally as my duties permit. I cannot come on the poop except when it is my trick at the wheel, and if you care to see me when I'm off duty, you will have to come as far as the waist, at any rate."

"I'll come. At any rate, I'll see you at the wheel. Remember," she added, laying her shapely hand on his arm, "you have promised to teach me to steer the ship, and I shall hold you to your word."

"I shall be glad to do that," he answered; "but I'm afraid you'll not find much fun in it, nor will you find it an easy job."

"I promise to be a patient pupil, anyway," she replied, smilingly.

"Supper is waiting for us, Miss Nellie," interposed Richard Savage, impatiently.

While she was talking to the young sailor he had been standing with a frown of annoyance on his face, one of his hands resting on the brass rail of the companion stairs.

He could not understand how she could waste so much time on a common sailor, and he was jealous because she did so.

"I will come in a moment, Mr. Savage. Don't wait for me."

"I thought you were going to call me Richard?" he said, in a piqued tone, not taking advantage of her permission to retire.

"Will you be on duty here some time, Jack?" she asked the young sailor, not noticing Savage's last remark.

"I'll be here two hours. This is the beginning of the second dog-watch. At four bells, or eight o'clock, I'll be relieved."

"Well, I must go to tea now. I'll see you when I'm through."

"All right, Nellie. I'll be glad to enjoy as much of your company as you may care to honor me with now that I'm under sea orders."

"Oh, you'll see enough of me before we reach Melbourne. It's quite a long trip in a sailing vessel."

"Yes. I'm thinking you'll find it tiresome long before you get near our destination."

"Do you think so?" she said, as she moved away. "Now, I don't agree with you. Good-by."

"Good-by, Nellie."

"I don't see what you find about a common sailor to talk so long to him," said Richard Savage, petulantly, as he followed her down the brass-bound stairs.

"Don't you?" she replied, with a toss of her head. "Jack Archer and I are old friends. And he isn't a common sailor, either," with some spirit in her voice.

"All sailors are common," persisted the young aristocrat, disdainfully.

"That's where you're mistaken. This is Jack's last trip before the mast. He will go out as second mate on the next voyage. Papa says he's competent to do that now, but there was no opening for him this trip."

"Mates are not so much better than sailors," sneered Savage.

"Aren't they?" laughed the girl.

"No. They graduate from the forecastle. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

"Indeed," cried Nellie, with a scornful look at her companion. "Perhaps I might be allowed to say that all's not gold that glitters, either."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Richard, almost angrily, having an idea that the girl was giving him a shot.

"Nothing more than what you meant by your remark," she replied, saucily, taking her seat at the table.

Richard looked disgruntled, and began to eat in silence.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD SAVAGE HAULS IN HIS HORNS A BIT.

Left alone at his post, Jack Archer attended to his duty of keeping the vessel on her course.

He kept his eye on the weather leach of the maintopsail yard.

When the sail began to flap a bit, he knew the ship was falling off, and he rectified the matter by moving the wheel a spoke or two.

Jack Archer was a fine lad, and a protege of Captain Rockwell's.

He was an orphan.

His father had been a warm personal friend of the master of the Golden Fleece, and when Jack was thrown on his own resources by the death of his surviving parent the skipper had offered to take him to sea and teach him the business.

Jack accepted the invitation gratefully, and though the captain played no favorites at sea, he gave the young sailor every opportunity to get ahead in his profession.

The boy had chances afforded him to put in his spare time studying navigation, and by using his eyes he soon became thoroughly familiar with the duties that fall to the lot of a ship's mate.

He was able to calculate a ship's position at sea by the most approved methods, and knew how to handle a vessel in theory under any condition.

He was familiar with the mysteries of the most complex knots, and knew how to repair damages to any part of a sailing craft.

In a word, he was a thoroughly practical sailor.

As darkness came over the face of the ocean, and the shadows fell upon the tophammer of the vessel, Jack struck

a match and lighted the lamp in the binnacle so he could see the face of the compass.

This was his guide now, the sailor whom he had relieved having given him the course.

The breeze had stiffened a bit at sundown, but not enough to careen the vessel to any extent to the leeward.

Steering the ship under the present conditions was child's play to him, and did not absorb his whole attention.

He had time to think of various things, and probably the fair girl in the cabin, whose silvery laugh occasionally came to his ears up the companion-way, occupied her share of his thoughts.

He considered Nellie an old friend, since they had known each other all of six years.

They had always been good friends, too, though they sometimes had their sham battles just to add spice to their friendship.

In fact, they were very like brother and sister in their attitude to each other.

At length Nellie came running up the companion stairs, followed by Richard Savage.

The long edge of gray haze which lay around the eastern horizon, on which the dark rim of the sea was defined, as with the sweep of a soft brush dipped in indigo, had been gradually lightening during the last few minutes—at first with a faint radiance, then a thread of silver ran along the line of vapor, growing brighter and brighter at one point, until the arch of the moon rose slowly, like the fabled Venus from her couch in the sea.

Nellie struck the deck at that moment.

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" she cried, rapturously. "Isn't it, Jack?"

"Yes," replied the young sailor, without any special enthusiasm, for he had seen the sight so often that it was an old story with him. "It's almost as lovely as somebody I know."

The girl easily understood the compliment his words implied, and she flashed a swift glance at him through the darkness, while the color mounted in her face and her heart beat a shade quicker.

Richard Savage also heard his remark, understood its import, and muttered something savagely between his teeth.

"Come, Miss Nellie," he said, catching her by the arm, "let's go over by the rail. This sailor has his work to attend to."

"No," she replied, "I'm going to talk to Jack. Will you permit me to introduce you, and then we can all three chat together?"

"You'll have to excuse me," he said, stiffly, walking away in a huff.

"He's mad," laughed the girl to Jack. "But I don't care. He's too tony for me, anyway. I'm sorry he came with us, for I don't think I shall like him a bit."

"I guess he doesn't want to know an every-day sailor like me. Well, just wait till a bit of rough weather hits us. It will take all the starch out of that dude," chuckled Jack.

"Oh, I sha'n't like rough weather a bit, at least, not at first. I know I shall be dreadfully seasick."

"I'm afraid that's one of the penalties of coming to sea, Nellie. But you won't be under hatches long, that's one consolation."

"How do you know I won't? Suppose a storm comes up that lasts a week? Where will I be all that time?"

"In your little bunk, probably," grinned Jack. "At any rate, you'll have my sympathy."

"If that would cure me I'd be under lasting obligations to you, but I'm afraid that it wouldn't."

"I'll tell you what would cure you quicker than anything else."

"What? I'd like to know," she said, eagerly.

"A piece of nice, fat pork held in front of your nose," laughed Jack.

"You horrid fellow!" cried the girl, giving him a playful pinch on the arm. "You know that would make me twice as sick."

"Only for a short time, and then you'd come around like a bird. I know, for it was tried on me."

At that moment Captain Rockwell came on deck and glanced at the compass card.

Nellie then walked over to the spot where Richard Savage was gnawing his finger nails in sullen anger.

"Well, Mr. Richard, are you very much provoked with me?" she asked him, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"I don't see why you want to talk to that fellow in preference to me," he growled, ill-humoredly.

"Didn't I tell you that Jack and I are old friends? I think as much of him as though he were my brother. You ought to let me introduce you to him. You'd find him one of the nicest boys you ever met."

"I dare say," replied Richard, sarcastically; "but I'm not accustomed to talking to common boys."

"Oh, fudge!" replied Nellie. "You'll get over that feeling before you reach Melbourne. What's the use of being so exclusive on board ship?" added the independent little miss. "It's all very well when you're at home, where you can choose your own associates. But here it is different. Can't you see that? Papa says the sea is the greatest leveler in the world. That it will bring even a king to his knees. If you only expect to talk to papa and me I'm afraid you'll soon find yourself rather lonesome."

Young Savage wasn't used to being talked to in that fashion, even by his mother, and it went against his grain.

Still, he did not feel disposed to quarrel with so charming a creature as the captain's daughter, especially as she was the only one aboard he had any disposition to be on friendly terms with.

While he was provoked with her independent spirit, somehow or another he could not help liking her all the more because she didn't kowtow to him.

He saw that to secure her favor he must make an effort to propitiate her, and this was rather a new experience for him with the girls.

"Well," he said, a bit ungraciously, "you can introduce me to your friend Jack."

"Now you're acting sensibly, Mr. Richard," she replied, with a pleased laugh.

"I wish you'd drop the mister, Miss Nellie," said Richard, pettishly.

"Oh, I couldn't, that is, not just yet. Wait till I know you better."

Nellie led the way to where Jack stood with his weather-brown hands on the spokes of the wheel.

"Jack, this is Richard Savage, son of one of the owners

of the ship. Mr. Richard, let me introduce you to Jack Archer."

Richard bowed rather stiffly, and gingerly accepted the hand that Archer extended to him.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Savage," said Jack, breezily.

Richard murmured something that Jack could not understand, and then the three began to talk together, but the young aristocrat devoted the greater part of his conversation to Nellie.

At length four bells were struck again, which was the signal of Jack's relief, and the beginning of the first watch, from eight o'clock till midnight.

A sailor came forward to take the wheel.

Jack gave him the course, and after remaining about five minutes to finish his conversation with Nellie and her companion, he bade them both good-night, and, greatly to Richard's satisfaction, went forward to turn in.

CHAPTER III.

BILL BLAINE.

The wind held light for nearly a week, and neither Nellie nor Richard Savage experienced even the suspicion of seasickness.

Richard himself began to feel much better physically than he had been for many months past, and he also grew quite cocky over the fact that he was not seasick.

Jack Archer saw Nellie frequently, but it was nearly always in the company of Savage, who clung about the girl like a leech, and showed a tinge of jealousy every time she approached the young sailor.

Finally the sixth morning broke dull and threatening.

There was a rough sea on, to which the ship courtesied with the grace of a French dancing-master, and then rolled to the leeward, her head rising as she afterward rolled to the windward.

There was nothing unpleasant about this motion to the people aboard who had acquired their sea legs, but it knocked all the pleasures of life out of Nellie Rockwell and Richard Savage, who awoke in their berths feeling very miserable indeed.

Jack Archer and his chum, Butch Whitbeck, a jolly, but not over-handsome, boy of about his own age, were sitting together with their backs against the mainmast, conversing.

They were both members of the first mate's watch, which went on duty this morning at four o'clock.

It was now after six, and there wasn't the slightest sign of the sun.

"Looks as if we're going to have a gale, Jack," said Whitbeck, hunching up his knees.

"We'll have it, all right," replied his companion. "I took the liberty of looking at the barometer when we turned out, and I looked at it a few minutes ago again. It is falling, and has been falling, the mate told me, since midnight."

"That dude we've got aboard, who has been putting on airs because he has not been sick, will get all that's coming to him now," chuckled Whitbeck.

"That's what he will," grinned Jack. "I can't say that I have any sympathy to waste on him. Every time he's talked to me he seemed to consider it a kind of condescension on his part."

"Those kind of chaps make me sick," said Butch. "I suppose he thinks because his father owns this ship we ought to get down on our knees to him. Well, you won't catch me salaaming to him. Not on your tintage!"

At that moment there was a call from the mate for the watch to shorten sail.

Jack and Butch sprang to their feet and both were soon scrambling up the ratlines like a pair of monkeys.

In a few minutes they were hanging out on the foretop-sail yard, helping to furl the sail.

Some of the canvas was taken in entirely, and reefs were made in the other sails.

Then the boys returned to the deck.

Half a gale was soon blowing and the pitch of the vessel increased to a considerable extent.

In the course of an hour breakfast was served out to the crew, and they ate like men to whom the pains of dyspepsia were as a sealed book.

The captain and the first mate breakfasted alone in the cabin that morning, for neither Nellie nor Richard Savage were in a condition to leave their berths.

The weather continued about the same all day, and toward night the barometer began to rise again.

Next morning there was still a pretty good sea running, but the sky was clear and the sun rose in all his customary glory.

On this morning Jack and Butch went on duty in the forenoon watch, which began at eight and lasted till noon.

Jack was sent forward to take a spell as lookout.

About nine o'clock he saw something dark bobbing up and down on the waves right ahead.

It was impossible for him to tell what it was, owing to the distance that intervened.

He kept his eye on it, however, and in the course of ten minutes made it out to be a large hencoop, with something stretched across the top of it.

He reported the fact to the first mate, who brought his glass to bear on the object.

The officer soon made out that a man was either clinging to the coop, or was lashed to it.

He sent word to Captain Rockwell, who was in the cabin looking after his sick daughter.

The skipper came on deck, took a look at the coop and then ordered a boat lowered to pick up the man, who was evidently alive, for he was seen to turn his head and look at the approaching vessel.

The ship was hove to, the boat was sent away, and the unfortunate stranger, who proved to be a sailor, was soon on board.

As soon as he was taken from the coop, the mate, who had gone with the boat, produced a flask of brandy and poured a good dose down the man's throat.

It put life into the fellow at once, and he sat up without help.

After the boat was raised to the davits the rescued chap stepped down on deck with a little help from the boat's crew and looked fore and aft with a seaman's experienced eye.

The mate led him aft to give an account of himself to the captain.

He was a pretty hard-looking object, as he stood bare-headed in his soaked garments before the skipper.

There was a sinister glint in his eyes that did not fa-

vorably impress Captain Rockwell, and he addressed the fellow rather sharply.

"What's your name?" was the first question the skipper put to him.

"My name," replied the man, slowly, in a hoarse tone that seemed to come from his boots, "is Bill Blaine."

"Bill Blaine, eh? How came you to be on that hencoop?"

"Me and the hencoop is all that's left of the brig Wellington."

"How and when did the brig founder?"

"In a corkin' gale two nights ago."

"Who was the master, where did she hail from, and where bound?"

"The skipper's name was Jenkins. We was bound from Sidney to San Francisco with a load of coal."

The captain asked him several other questions and then told the mate to fit him out with a dry suit of togs from the slop chest, and to take him forward to the galley, where the negro cook would give him something to eat.

"I don't like the chap's looks," said the mate, subsequently, to his superior.

"Nor I," replied the captain. "He looks for all the world like one of those South Sea Island beach-combers, and you know what class of men they are. Formerly graduates from Botany Bay, and other British penal settlements in Australia, they are now not a whit better than their predecessors. This chap has the face of a rascal in every line, and his eye is the eye of an man not to be trusted. Take him into your watch and keep a sharp lookout on him."

Bill Blaine, the newcomer, ate all that the cook set before him and then retired to the fore-castle, where a spare bunk was assigned to him.

He tossed his dry clothes on the foot of the bunk, got rid of his wet ones, and crawling under the blankets, was soon snoring away as though he had been in the ship since she left port.

He woke up late in the afternoon, sat up with his bare legs dangling out of the bunk and looked around the gloomy sailor's parlor.

Then he began to sing in a fog-horn voice:

"Thirteen dead men 'round the carpenter's chest

Yo ho, and a bottle of rum!

Old Nick and the sharks have got the rest,

Yo ho, and a bottle——"

"Hello, my bully!" he said, breaking off suddenly and looking across at Jack Archer, who had been lying with his clothes on upon his bunk and who had started up when the fellow began his vocal offering. "Hand me a chaw of 'bacey, will you?"

"Sorry that I can't oblige you, but I don't chew," replied Jack.

"You don't—chew!" replied Blaine, slowly. "You don't chew!" he repeated. "Say, what kind of a hybrid animal are ye anyway?"

"I'll get you some tobacco," replied Jack, springing out of his bunk.

"That's right, my hearty," cried the fellow. "Now yer talkin'."

Jack secured part of a plug for the derelict and brought it to him.

He took a big bite of the compressed weed, eyeing Jack all the time from head to foot, as if sizing the lad up, and then put the rest of the plug under his pillow.

"What's yer name, younker?" he asked.

"Jack Archer, and yours is Bill Blaine, I believe."

"You believe right, then," chuckled the fellow. "Say, what's the name of this old hooker?"

"The Golden Fleece, George Rockwell, master, seven days from 'Frisco, and bound for Melbourne," said Jack.

"Bound for where?" exclaimed Bill Blaine, suddenly stopping his jaws.

"Melbourne, Australia."

The derelict ripped out an imprecation and glared savagely at Jack.

The boy was startled by the nasty look in his eyes.

"So this hooker is bound for Melbourne, is she?" he muttered, in a hissing tone. "Cuss Melbourne and the hull British—say, my hearty, kin you get me a drink of rum? I'm sick, and I need it. You git it and me and you's friends."

Jack thought he'd rather be excused from having such a rascally-looking chap for a friend.

However, he didn't let the fellow suspect his sentiments, but told him he'd get the liquor.

Representing that Bill Blaine was not feeling well, he got a glass of stiff spirits from the chief mate and brought it to the derelict.

The fellow threw it off at a gulp, winked one eye, smacked his lips, and started to get into the garments the mate had given him.

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED FROM THE SEA.

Next morning while Jack was at the wheel Nellie came up the companion stairs, looking rather seedy.

"Good-morning, Nellie. Glad to see you on your pins again. How are you feeling?"

"Don't mention it, Jack," she replied, with a little grimace. "I've been dreadfully ill. I thought I should die."

"Die! Nobody dies of seasickness, not unless there's something else the matter with them. Say, how is Savage?" he added, with a grin.

"Papa told me that he was twice as sick as I was."

"Ho! He was the boy that didn't think he was going to get sick this side of Melbourne. I hope it's taken some of the conceit out of him. Isn't he out of his bunk yet?"

"I haven't seen him."

"If he knew you were talking to me now he'd be up here if he had to crawl," chuckled Jack.

"What makes you think so?"

"He's dead jealous of me talking to you."

"What nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. I can read that chap like a book. He's gone on you."

"He is not," protested Nellie, with a blush.

"All right. Have it your own way. I'm not going to scrap with you just after you've got out of bed. But it's a fact, just the same."

"I think you're real mean to tease me about Richard Savage. He doesn't care about an ordinary girl like me."

"Ordinary girl like you," repeated Jack, with a twinkle in his eye. "Do you call yourself an ordinary girl?"

"What else am I? Papa is only a sea captain."

"Oh, I see what you're getting at. But you're not ordinary by any means. You're as pretty and as nice as any girl Savage knows in his high-toned circle of acquaintances. If you weren't he wouldn't hang around you as if he was afraid you might get away from him."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied Nellie, with a smile, dropping him a mock courtesy.

"Don't mention it, you're welcome."

"Say, Jack, papa told me that we picked up a man adrift on a hencoop. He said the man claimed to be the only survivor of a brig that went down in the recent gale."

"That's right. But he's a pretty hard character. He's in my watch, and the worst of it is he's taken a fancy to me and Butch, or pretends he has. I don't like him for sour potatoes. Neither does Whitbeck. He's got a bad eye, and goodness, how he can swear! He seems to have a grouch against Australia for some reason. He told Butch that he didn't intend going there, but I don't see how he can help himself, unless he jumps overboard."

"Papa isn't overpleased to have him on board, I should judge. What is his name?"

"Bill Blaine. He's short, thick-set, and has a wicked eye. You'll see him when he stands his trick at the wheel."

"I'm not anxious to see him."

There was a shuffling sound on the companion stairs, and a moment later a chalky-looking countenance rose slowly above the deck.

"Hello, Savage," said Jack, "got your sea legs on at last, have you?"

The young aristocrat looked shaky and somewhat unhappy.

He had not yet recovered wholly from his indisposition, but Captain Rockwell had routed him out of his bunk and chased him on deck to get the sea breeze.

"Good-morning, Mr. Richard," said Nellie, pleasantly. "How do you feel?"

"I feel all broke up," replied Richard.

"Had your breakfast yet?" asked Jack.

"I can't eat anything," said Richard, with a rueful expression.

"You only think you can't. A nice, juicy slice of fat pork now would——"

"Oh, lor'! Don't talk about such a thing," groaned Richard, putting his hand on his stomach.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Jack, to suggest such a thing?" said Nellie, trying to maintain a sober face.

"That's what the second mate brought me after I had been sick a whole day and night," chuckled the young sailor.

"And you ate it, didn't you?" laughed the girl.

"I did—like fun. I jumped out of my bunk and ran on deck, where the sea air soon cured me. You'll feel all right in an hour or so, Savage, especially if you go for'ard and sun yourself on the fok's'le."

Richard wobbled as he tried to walk about the quarter deck.

Finally he leaned heavily on the rail and looked down at the water, as it rose and fell with the vessel.

Jack and Nellie resumed their conversation and almost forgot that Richard was near them.

Suddenly as the vessel rose on the swell they were startled by a cry of terror from Savage.

They turned just in time to see his legs disappearing over the rail.

Richard had been overcome with weakness and dizziness, and, leaning too far over the taffrail, had lost his balance.

Nellie uttered a scream that attracted the attention not only of the second mate, who stood at the break of the poop watching something going on forward, but of all on deck.

"My gracious!" ejaculated Jack, releasing the wheel, and springing for one of the life-preservers lashed to the rail. "Grab the wheel, Nellie, and hold it steady."

The girl did so, while Jack, finding that he couldn't disengage the life-preserver quick enough, sprang overboard to the assistance of young Savage.

The second mate, seeing Jack go over the stern, roared "Man overboard!" and rushed to the wheel.

Captain Rockwell dashed up the stairs and asked what was the matter.

The second mate pointed astern to where Jack was swimming, while Nellie tearfully explained that Richard had fallen overboard and Jack had jumped after him.

The captain issued hurried orders to bring the ship to, and threw a couple of the life-preservers into the sea.

In the meantime Jack was striking out in an effort to reach the ship owner's son, whom he could not yet make out anywhere on the waves.

Richard sank like a shot when he first struck the water. He uttered a second cry for help just as the sea closed over his head.

When he came up the vessel was some distance away, and the frightened boy gave himself up for lost.

He could swim pretty well under ordinary circumstances, but under present conditions he was so rattled that he couldn't do anything for himself except waste the little strength he had in beating the water aimlessly.

Consequently he went down again until his consciousness almost forsook him.

Jack was a fine swimmer, and rode the surges like a duck.

Every time he was swept upward he looked around for some sign of Savage, but for a time he saw nothing of the unfortunate boy.

He was on the point of giving up the quest, thinking that Richard had sunk never to rise again, when he saw the boy's head rise a short distance from him.

This was the second time that Richard came to the surface.

Jack at once made a desperate effort to reach him before he sank again.

He was almost within reach of the almost unconscious boy when he began to sink for what would have been the final time.

Jack felt that all depended on the result of the next few seconds.

Throwing himself forward he dived at the receding figure.

His body cleaved the water like a fish, and his hands grasped the now senseless youth.

Kicking out, he came to the surface with Savage.

As the surge swept them upward Jack saw the Golden Fleece hove to a quarter of a mile away, and a boat working toward them at full speed.

The second mate was standing up in her stern scanning the waves for one or both of the boys.

At length he made out two heads on the surface of the heaving sea, and directed the boat's head toward them.

Jack was treading water and supporting Savage with one arm.

When the boat came up Richard was lifted aboard and then Jack, somewhat exhausted by his plucky exertions, was assisted over the side.

The boat then put back for the ship.

Nellie, leaning anxiously over the taffrail, waved her handkerchief joyously when she saw that both of the boys were in the boat.

"Richard is safe, papa," she cried, eager to reassure her father, who had been in a fever of anxious suspense from the moment he heard that the owner's only son and heir had gone over into the sea. "Jack saved his life."

"Thank Heaven!" said Captain Rockwell. "Had the boy been lost, I don't know how I ever could have faced Mr. Savage again. He sent Richard to sea in my care, and I feel that I am responsible for his safe return home."

While he was speaking the boat glided up alongside and the hoisting tackle was made fast fore and aft.

Most of the boat's crew climbed aboard and then she was raised to the davits, after which Richard was lifted out, carried to his stateroom, and efforts made to bring him to his senses.

CHAPTER V.

NELLIE TAKES A LESSON IN STEERING AND PROVES AN APT PUPIL.

Vigorous methods brought Richard Savage around all right, but he was a pretty weak boy after his strenuous experience with the waves.

He learned that his life had been saved by Jack Archer, and he seemed to be grateful to the young sailor.

At least he so expressed himself to Captain Rockwell.

"Savage had a pretty narrow squeak for his life," said Jack to Butch Whitbeck in the forecastle, while he was getting into dry clothes after the return of the boat. "He was going down for the last time when I dived and grabbed him. I consider him a mighty lucky boy."

"He was that. He ought to be grateful to you as long as he lives," replied Whitbeck.

"Whether he's grateful or not I'm satisfied, for I did my duty. It would have been tough on the skipper if Savage had been lost. He's responsible, in a way, for Richard's safety while he's aboard this ship."

When Jack went on deck again he encountered Bill Blaine.

"Hello, my hearty!" said the hard-looking sailor. "So yer've been takin' a swim, have ye? Who's the chap yer pulled out?"

"He's a passenger. A boy of my own age."

"Son of the owner of this here hooker, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Got lots of money, eh?" and Blaine's eyes winked in a wicked kind of way.

"I suppose his father is well fixed," replied Jack, not anxious to continue the conversation.

"What's he goin' to Australia for?" persisted Blaine.

"His health."

Blaine said no more, but walked to the vessel's side and ejected a stream of tobacco juice over the bulwark to the leeward.

Richard Savage wasn't seen on deck again until next day noon, when Jack and Whitbeck saw him sitting with Nellie, on camp chairs, near the helmsman.

After that he rapidly improved.

Jack met him when he went to put in his trick at the wheel.

"I'm much obliged to you for saving my life," he said, without any great display of enthusiasm, to Archer.

"You're welcome," replied Jack, heartily.

"My father will pay you well when the ship gets back to 'Frisco."

"No, he won't," replied the young sailor, quickly. "I don't accept pay for such things as that."

"You don't!" ejaculated Richard, in surprise. "Why not?"

"I don't believe in it."

"My father can easily give you a thousand dollars."

"I've no doubt he can, but I don't want it."

"You don't want a thousand dollars?"

"Not for saving your life."

"But I don't want to be under obligations to you. I'd rather pay you."

"Well, you can't pay me for risking my life for you."

"You didn't take any great risk, did you? You sailors can swim like ducks. I can swim, too, first rate, but I was weak and sick at the time."

"There isn't any use of our arguing the matter, Savage. I'm glad that I was able to save you. We'll let the matter go at that."

"So you won't take a thousand dollars?"

"No, I won't."

"It's a lot of money—for a poor boy like you."

"I know it's a lot of money; but that doesn't make any difference."

"You don't seem to know the value of money," said Richard, petulantly. "That's because you never had much, I suppose."

"That needn't worry you."

"Maybe you're proud," sneered Richard.

"Perhaps I am," replied Jack, shortly.

"You aren't like other boys that I know."

"Probably not."

"I've always had plenty of money to spend, and always expect to," said Richard, in a complacent tone.

"You're lucky."

"It costs a lot of money to have a good time, but you, being a poor boy, can't understand that, of course," said Richard, swelling out with importance. "My clothes are made by the best tailor in 'Frisco. I attend an academy where only the sons of the best people are taken. I'm going to college next year. I intend to study law and become a big corporation lawyer. They make lots of money. I suppose I shall make more in one year than a poor boy like you will earn in all your life."

"And you'll spend more in one year than I will in all my life, I guess," replied Jack, more amused than displeased with the boy's consequential talk.

"Of course. A gentleman always spends a lot of money. He's got to to maintain his position in society."

"If I ever require the services of a lawyer I suppose I can come to you?"

"Oh, I don't expect to take small cases. It wouldn't pay me. However, as I owe you a great favor I'll let one of my clerks attend to the matter. I sha'n't charge you a cent, of course," patronizingly.

"Thanks, you're very kind," said Jack, with a sly grin.

Richard then walked away, fully satisfied that he had impressed the young sailor with a proper idea of his importance in the community.

"Mr. Richard says you refused to accept a thousand dollars for saving his life, Jack," said Nellie, when she saw Jack, later on.

"He told me that his father would pay me that sum when we got back to 'Frisco, but I told him very plainly that I wouldn't take a dollar. There are some things that money won't pay for, and that's one of them."

"I guess you are right, Jack," replied Nellie, approvingly. "He thinks you are a queer kind of boy."

"He's welcome to think as he chooses."

"He advised me not to be too familiar with you," said Nellie, laughingly.

"Very kind of him," replied the young sailor, sarcastically.

"He said you'd probably never rise in the world higher than a first mate, and of course you'd always be poor."

"He seems to know all about it."

"He told me that he expected to be governor of California some day."

"He's aiming high, at any rate."

"He expects to live in a grand house on Nob Hill or Van Ness Avenue."

"Say, he's all right, isn't he?" grinned Jack.

"He's the most conceited boy I ever met."

"When a fellow is brought up on a bed of down, and fed with a golden or a silver spoon, and has servants kowtowing to him all the time, what else can you expect?"

"I don't believe all rich boys are so conceited. Some have more sense."

"I wouldn't change places with him for all his chances in life," said Jack, with a resolute air. "I intend to work my way to the top of the ladder, somehow. I don't intend to stick to the sea all my life. A fellow who has to buck against the world has more chance to succeed, in my opinion, than a chap who depends on his money and his pull—that is, if he's got the right stuff in him."

"I think you have the right stuff, as you call it, Jack," replied Nellie, nodding her fair head in a positive way. "I'd sooner bet on your chances than on Mr. Richard's. He isn't a man yet, and there is many a slip between the cup and the lip."

"That's right, Nellie. If he ever met with a big set-back I'd feel sorry for him. You can't tell but he might wind up in the poorhouse yet."

"There isn't much likelihood of you going to the poorhouse, I guess."

"I hope not. My expectations are not quite as big as Savage's, but still I hope to make my mark in some way. If I fail it won't be for the lack of trying."

"I am sure of that, Jack," said the girl, confidently. "Well, when are you going to teach me to steer?"

"Now is as good as any time for you to take your first lesson. Our course is west-sou'-west. Look at the card. You'll see I've got that point on a line with that black mark on the compass rim. You want to keep it there. Take hold of the spokes and try."

Nellie did so with some diffidence.

Jack kept his eye on the weather leach of the topsail yard and saw, as he expected, the sail begin to flap.

"You're off your course, Nellie. Bring her up a bit."

"Why, the wheel hasn't moved any!" replied the girl in surprise.

"You only think it hasn't. Look at the card. You're half a point out of the way."

"Why, so it is. The card has moved around."

"No, it hasn't. The card always remains stationary, pointing toward the north. It's the ship that has moved around."

Jack moved the wheel a trifle and the card appeared to move around to its former position.

After several trials Nellie found that, do her best, she couldn't keep W. S. W. on a line with the mark.

"Suppose you look aloft, Nellie. See that sail?"

"Yes."

"It looks as smooth as a board, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"The vessel is now dead on her course. Now, hold the wheel again and keep your eye on the sail."

Nellie did so.

"It's beginning to ripple. Now it's flapping."

"Exactly. It's spilling some of the wind because you're off your sailing point. Move the wheel a little to starboard. That's right. Now the sail is taut again and you're all right."

"How funny! Now it's shaking again."

"Do as you did before."

After repeated instructions the girl got the knack of holding the sail steady.

"You're doing fine now, Nellie."

Just then Richard came up and looked on with some curiosity.

"Are you steering, Miss Nellie?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, with a flushed face and sparkling eye.

"I'm doing it all right, too, ain't I, Jack?"

"Sure, you are."

"If you can steer, I guess I can," said Richard, confidently.

"Let him try, Jack."

"All right. You show him how."

So Nellie proceeded to repeat Jack's instructions to Savage, and he grabbed the spokes before she was half through.

"You're off your course," cried the girl, clapping her hands.

"How am I? She's going along all right."

"No, she isn't. The sail is flapping."

"What if it is? That little bit doesn't hurt," said Richard, doggedly.

The sail flapped more and more, and soon the wind began to spill from the larger sails as the ship veered little by little off her course.

Jack hastened to rectify the matter, for he knew the first

mate would soon take notice of the falling off of the ship's head.

Richard, however, insisted on steering as long as he felt like it.

He said his father owned the vessel and he had the right to steer if he wanted to.

He snarled at Jack for constantly interfering, until the young sailor lost his patience and took the wheel away from him.

Then he retired, in a sulky way, with Nellie, saying that he had been insulted.

CHAPTER VI.

BILL BLAINE AND RICHARD SAVAGE.

Nellie took other lessons in steering when the wind and weather permitted, and finally was able to steer by card.

Richard was too proud to try again while Jack was around, but one day when Bill Blaine was at the wheel he came up and, offering the sailor a dollar bill, asked him to show him how to steer.

Blaine grinned, took the money and proceeded to instruct him.

Although the hard-looking sailor was the last person on board that one would suppose such a boy as Richard Savage would notice, yet before Blaine was relieved from the wheel the young aristocrat had become quite chummy with him, much to Nellie's disgust.

She took the first occasion to call Richard down about it.

"I should think you'd prefer to cultivate the acquaintance of a nice boy of your own age, like Jack, than to make friends with such a man as Blaine," she said.

"Oh, he's all right," replied Richard, carelessly. "He's only a common sailor, of course, but he knows his place. He doesn't try to put on style like Jack Archer. I hate these poor folks who try to make themselves out more than they are."

"You're mistaken about Jack," replied Nellie, standing up loyally for her friend. "He doesn't put on airs."

"Yes, he does. He puts on a whole lot of frills for a fellow of his low origin."

"What do you mean by low origin?" flashed the girl.

"Well, his people were common people, of course."

"How do you know they were?" she ejaculated, indignantly.

"Oh, I judge so," drawled the boy. "I s'pose you haven't any objection to me smoking a cigarette, have you? They're real Turkish. Cost me fifty cents a box."

He produced a box, took out a gilt paper cylinder and proceeded to light it.

"I want you to know that Jack's parents were just as good as mine," said Nellie.

Richard puffed his cigarette and made no reply.

"Jack is just as smart as any boy in the world, too," she continued, with some energy. "He may not rise to become governor of California, but he'll make his mark some other way."

"I wish you'd take as much interest in me as you do in him," said Richard, looking at her admiringly. "It would pay you better."

"Indeed!" she replied, a bit resentfully.

"I am a gentleman, while he's only a common sailor,"

said Richard, putting away nonchalantly with one leg crossed over the other, as if he was the whole thing.

"If you were a gentleman, you wouldn't tell us any more do," cried the girl, rising from her seat beside him and leaving the deck.

"She's a little fool," muttered Richard, angrily. "She doesn't know a good thing when she's got it. If she wasn't so pretty, and fascinating, I'd—oh, there's Blaine at the wheel. I'll go over and talk with him. He takes his hat off to me because he understands that I'm his superior. I can afford to come on with him. Besides, he said he had something confidential to tell me—something he wouldn't tell anybody else in the ship, even the captain. I wonder what it is?"

He walked over to the wheel.

Blaine saluted him respectfully and they were soon talking together like old friends.

"So ye don't like that Jack Archer, eh?" said Blaine, in the course of their talk.

"No, I don't. He puts on too many airs for me."

"That's right," coincided Blaine, "so he does. He and his chum, Butch Whitbeck, I don't like him myself."

"He thinks because he jumped overboard after me that he's as good as I am."

"Of course he does," agreed the hard sailor. "That's the way with them sort of chaps."

"I offered him a thousand dollars for what he did, but he was too proud to take it."

"You offered him a thousand dollars, did ye?" said the sailor, his eyes twinkling.

"I said my father would pay him that when we got back to 'Frisco."

"Oh, I see. Thought mebbe ye had the money with yer."

"Of course not. The captain has a bank draft for £100 in his safe which I'm going to blow in when I get to Melbourne," said Richard, confidentially.

"Yer folks must be made of money."

"They're well fixed," replied Richard, proudly. "It's all coming to me ere of these days."

"Ye'll have some time to wait, though. Now, how would ye like to have a barrel of real gold to spend before ye come into what yer folks has?"

"I'd like it first class, but there's no danger of it coming my way."

"Isn't there?" said the sailor, dropping his voice. "Mebbe I could put you next to it."

"What do you mean?" asked Richard, taken by surprise.

"Can ye keep a secret?" asked Blaine, fixing the young aristocrat with his wicked eyes.

"Of course, I can," replied Richard, eagerly, and much impressed by the sailor's words.

"Very good. Then I know a place—an island in the south seas—where there are bushel-baskets of shining gold coin."

"Bushel-baskets of shining gold coin!" ejaculated Richard, in amazement.

The sailor nodded mysteriously.

"There's a million dollars' worth if there's a cent," he said, solemnly.

"Where is this island?" asked Richard, eagerly.

"In the South Pacific. It's a little over will pass within

few hundred miles of it on her course to Melbourne. I've got the latitude and longitude of the place, and could find it if I knewed anything about navigation. But I don't."

"Whereabouts on the island is the money?"

"It's hid away in secret caves, as Iargeound."

"And you know where those caves are?"

"Not exactly, but I'll bet I could find 'em."

"You said you could put me next to this money?"

"I did."

"How?"

"The main thing is to reach the island. Your father owns this hooker, consequently ye ought to have some influence with the skipper."

"Well?"

"P'haps ye could git him to visit a certain island I could mention—one of the Fiji group. If he'll oblige ye by doing it, I could find a schooner there, d'ye see, to take us to the island where the gold is."

"But even if Captain Rockwell was willing to touch at this island you mention, which ain't certain, he wouldn't let me sail away with you in your schooner."

"He needn't know nothin' about it, my hearty," said Blaine, with a shifty glint in his eyes. "The moment he drops anchor off this here Fiji island ye must get permission to go ashore to see the place."

"Yes."

"Then ye must see to it that me, Jack Archer and Butch Whitbeck goes along with yer in the boat."

"Why Jack Archer and Whitbeck?" objected Richard. "You aren't going to let them in on this gold, too, are you?"

"Not by a long shot! But that's part of my plan. We've got to have somebody that understands navigation. Jack Archer is as good as any mate. Then Whitbeck kin help us work the schooner down to the island where the secret caves is. Then we'll promise 'em equal share of the money to help us load it aboard the vessel. After that Archer'll navigate the schooner back to the Fiji island. Then——"

"Well," said Richard, as Bill Blaine paused.

"We'll fix the rest when we git that far," said the rascal, evasively. "One thing ye kin depend on, them chaps won't git none of the gold. We'll divide that ekal between me and you."

"Captain Rockwell will be awfully mad if we keep this ship waiting at the island for us to go to that place where the money is and get back with it."

"Don't ye worry about that, my hearty. Ye'll have half a million or more of shinin' gold pieces to spend, so ye needn't care what nobody thinks."

The picture drawn by the artful sailor was very alluring to the boyish fancy of Richard Savage.

It was full of adventure, with a golden bait that was exceptionally attractive.

He did not think of the perils that surrounded such a hair-brained expedition, nor did he mistrust the honesty of the evil-eyed sailor who proposed it.

"Are ye with me in this?" said Blaine, after a pause.

"Yes, I'm with you, if the thing can be done," replied Richard.

"Well, my hearty, it's up to ye to work the skipper to put in to the Fiji island. That's the main thing, as I said before. We must put in at that there island."

"What's the name of that island?"

"Papua."

"How far is it from here?"

"Dunno. A good way. Get the captain to show it to ye on his chart. Find out from him how near we pass it, and then try and get him to put in there. Ships do stop there often for fresh water. I might manage to get at some of our hogsheads and start 'em leakin' so we'd have to put in somewhere for water, anyway," he added, with a diabolical grin. "If he had to have fresh water he'd put in at Papua jest to oblige ye."

"I'll see what I can do about it," said Richard, evidently more than half committed to the scheme, "and I'll let you know next time you come to the wheel."

"That's right, my hearty," said the rascal, encouragingly. "You do your part and I'll do mine arterward. Jest remember that there's gold to burn on the island where the secret caves is."

"You are sure it's gold money?"

"Sartin sure, shipmate. Bright, shinin' gold coin."

"How did all that money get on that island?" asked Richard, curiously.

"That's a story by itself which I'll tell ye some time."

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No. It'll soon be eight bells, and I'll have to leave ye. However, I kin say this much: That there gold is mostly Spanish, and was stored up by the pirates that used to sail the South Pacific a long time ago. Long before you and me was born. It's waitin' for somebody to come and take it, and you and me is goin' to be the lucky ones. Hist! There comes the cap'n's gal. Don't say a word to her, nor anybody else, mind ye, about what I've told ye. Jest ye work the cap'n to go to that island."

Eight bells sounded at that moment, and the conference broke up.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW JACK AND HIS FRIEND BUTCH LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT THE TREASURE OF THE SECRET CAVES.

"Captain Rockwell, do you know anything about the Fiji Islands?" asked Richard Savage that evening at tea.

"Why, yes," replied the skipper of the Golden Fleece.

"I know something about the group. There are more than 200 of the islands in all, and nearly a third of them are inhabited. They are surrounded by shoals and reefs, and access to them is rather dangerous."

The last sentence was not particularly pleasing to Richard.

"One of them is called Papua, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes."

"I've read a good deal about this island," went on Richard, "and I should like to visit it if that were possible."

"I'm afraid you will not have the opportunity, as the ship does not touch at any point between Frisco and Melbourne."

"How far off your course is Papua?" asked Richard, somewhat disappointed at the captain's reply, which clearly indicated that he had no intention of putting in at any port than side of his destination.

"About 100 miles."

"Couldn't you put in at Papua for half a day to oblige me?"

Captain Rockwell shook his head.

"There is nothing on the island to interest you, Richard, and it wouldn't pay me to step there unless I needed water, which is unlikely."

"I am very anxious to taste some of the bread-fruit which I read grows on these islands," said Richard, after a slight pause.

"We may pass close enough to some island in the south seas where I can send a boat off and procure some for you to try after it has been cooked. Not only bread-fruit, but plantains, bananas, yams and cocoanuts, which are the chief productions of the south sea islands."

"It seems to me that if you go as close to Papua as 100 miles you could afford to stop at the island. My father wants me to see all that is to be seen during this trip, and Papua is a place I'm very anxious to visit."

"If a gale blew us within sight of that particular island I might accede to your request, or if we ran short of water, but neither contingency is likely to happen."

Richard saw there was no use in pressing the matter further, so he had nothing more to say about Papua that night.

Later on he told Bill Blaine that his efforts to persuade Captain Rockwell had been a failure.

"He said if a storm blew the ship within sight of the island, or if he ran short of water, he might put in there, otherwise he wouldn't," said Richard.

The hard-looking sailor scratched his head.

"We've got to git there somehow if we're goin' after that gold coin," he said. "Storms ain't to be depended on to come up jest when we want 'em, or blow the way we want 'em to, but things might be managed so that this hooker would run short of water."

"How?"

"Now, look here, my hearty, the less a chap knows sometimes the better it is for him," said the sailor, significantly.

Richard wondered what Blaine meant, but did not dare press the matter.

The sailor did not appear to be as disappointed as he had expected, which was because the rascal more than half expected that the young chap would not be able to persuade Captain Rockwell to put in at Papua.

"Well, now, shipmate, what you want to do is to watch the old man when he marks the hooker's position on his chart day by day, and find out when we're close aboard of the Fijis. You do this, and I'll look after the rest. I bet we'll get a sight of Papua yet."

Richard agreed to follow out Bill Blaine's suggestion, and keep the sailor accurately posted as to the ship's position day by day after she had passed the equator.

During one of the night watches soon after this conversation Blaine told Jack Archer and Butch Whitbeck the same story about the hidden gold in the secret caves of the island of which he claimed to know the latitude and longitude.

Jack didn't put much faith in the fellow's yarn, but Whitbeck was greatly excited over it.

"You say there are baskets full of gold stowed away in secret caves on a certain island of which you have the bearings?" asked Jack, incredulously.

The derision from the sea captain's family.

"How did you happen to find that out?" continued the boy. "You didn't see them, did you?"

"No, I didn't see 'em, but I got the story from a chap who did."

"How do you know he did? It seems to me a pretty tall story. If he saw the gold why didn't he bring it away with him?"

"Because he couldn't."

"Why couldn't he?"

"He had all he could do to bring himself away without thinkin' of the gold," replied the sailor, rather annoyed at Jack's cross-examination.

"Then the island is inhabited, and the inhabitants object to parting with the money, is that it?"

"The secret caves is inhabited by a number of copper-colored natives bossed over by a white girl whom they call their queen," replied Blaine.

"The chap who saw the money told you that?"

The hard-looking sailor nodded.

"How do you know your friend wasn't giving you a fake yarn?"

"I knowed he was tellin' me the solemn truth, 'cause he happened to be dyin' when he told me, and that ain't no time for ringin' in any sea yarns."

"Then you believe the story?" said Jack.

"Of course I do, my hearty. I believe it so much that I'm goin' to that there island to get hold of the coin."

"You are, eh?" grinned Jack.

"Sartin, and I want ye two to go with me to help me git hold of the stuff. Ye shall have an ekal share of the coin, and ye won't need to work no more afore the mast nor abaft it, either, arter we git our flukes on to it."

This proposition took both boys by surprise, and they looked hard at the derelict as if they thought he was off his balance.

"Whereabouts is this island where the secret caves are?" asked Jack, curiously.

Bill Blaine fixed Jack with his wicked-looking eyes and then winked one of them after a cunning and knowing fashion.

"Ye shall know that in good time, my hearty," replied the sailor. "Ye must first agree to stand in with me. I'm puttin' ye on to this 'cause ye are a navigator, I've heard. We must go in our own hooker to that there island—we three, and p'r'aps another chap whom I've spoken to about it. Four is aplenty to divide the gold between. Now d'ye understand?"

"Well, it's my opinion this thing is a wild goose chase at the best, and I'm not looking for such things."

As Jack's words indicated a practical refusal to engage in the enterprise, Bill Blaine's countenance took on an ugly look.

He had set his mind on having Archer to help him out, since he could do nothing without someone competent to navigate a vessel to the island in question, and he did not like to be balked in his plans.

"So you think it's a wild goose chase, do ye?" replied Blaine.

"It looks like it. Where did all this gold coin you speak about come from? What kind of coin is it? And why is it stowed away in secret caves on that island?"

"Ye are an eddicated lad, and p'r'aps ye've heard about

the pirates of the South Pacific—the chaps that used to loot the Spanish and Portuguese vessels that sailed the sea in them days when sailin' vessels carried gold and silver ingots, as well as chests of money, as part of their cargos."

"I've read about those rascals. They were put out of business nearly a hundred years ago," replied Jack.

Bill Blaine nodded.

"The island with the secret caves was the headquarters of Vasquez, the rover of the south seas. He hid his stealin's in them caves, and it's there now, waitin' for us to git it and put it into circulation. That's the answer ye wanted, ain't it?"

It was a plausible one, certainly.

The south sea rovers were credited with having accumulated a large amount of plunder in the course of many years of pillage.

While they had found it easy after their fashion to acquire the booty, the spending of it was a horse of another color.

Most of them were marked men, or at least a strong suspicion was likely to attach itself to any individual bearing a nautical and desperate look who took it into his head to appear in a seacoast town with a considerable amount of loose coin in his possession for which he could not satisfactorily account, and consequently the spending of the plunder became a dangerous occupation.

After a number of examples had been made by the South American authorities of such chaps the rest became cautious of courting a similar fate, therefore the booty, for the major part, remained hidden for better times, which never came.

Jack, being familiar with these facts, was willing to admit that a good part of the pirates' treasure might still be stored on some out-of-the-way island in the south seas, but for all that Bill Blaine's story and proposition did not appeal very favorably to his common sense.

Besides, he did not see how, even if he was disposed to fall in with the sailor's views, it was possible for him to engage in such a quest.

He supposed that Blaine's object was to secure a small vessel at Melbourne and sail off hundreds of miles into the treacherous latitudes of the south seas on a precarious hunt for an island that might easily elude their search in spite of his assumed knowledge of its position.

In order to do this he and Butch would have to sacrifice their berths on the Golden Fleece, thereby incurring Captain Rockwell's displeasure, and if the enterprise proved bootless, when they returned to Australia they would find themselves stranded in a foreign port, while his own prospects of becoming second mate under his generous patron would no doubt be sacrificed.

All these points passing before his mind, he stated them to Blaine as a sufficient excuse to offset his refusal to go into the scheme.

Blaine listened to him with a malevolent grin.

"In the first place, it ain't my intention to go to Melbourne," said the sailor.

"Oh, it isn't?" chuckled Jack. "Going to jump overboard and swim somewhere else?"

The sailor glared at him.

"The Island of Papua, one of the Fijis, ain't such a great distance from the island of the secret caves, and consequently we three must go to Papua and start from there."

"That's all very pretty," replied Jack; "but even supposing we agreed to go with you, which isn't likely, how would we get to Papua? Captain Rockwell is not going to put in at that island and wait for us to go in search of your treasure."

"Don't ye worry about how we're goin' to git there," replied the derelict, slyly. "You kin leave that to me. All I want to know is, will ye jine with me if we get to Papua, or some other island near it?"

As the chances of the Golden Fleece coming to anchor off Papua, or any other island in the South Pacific, was exceedingly remote, Jack jokingly agreed that in that case they would go with Blaine in search of the treasure of the secret caves.

"Enough said," replied Blaine, his wicked eyes gleaming with satisfaction; "then the matter is settled."

"It's settled, all right," said Jack, with a chuckle; but he meant in a different sense than Bill Blaine did.

Just the same Jack and Butch were ticketed for the island of the secret caves, though they didn't dream of such a thing.

That it was even remotely possible for Bill Blaine to exercise any influence at all over the course of the Golden Fleece struck the boys as something ridiculously funny; and yet the wicked-looking sailor was figuring on just such a thing, and expected to bring the matter to pass.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THINGS BEGIN TO COME BILL BLAINE'S WAY.

Fine weather was the rule, and the Pacific Ocean maintained its reputation as a comparatively tranquil body of water, as the Golden Fleece sailed west and south toward the antipodes.

In due time she crossed the equator without being bothered, and entered the South Pacific.

The hot weather they encountered rather took the starch out of both Nellie and Richard Savage, who had all their lives been accustomed to the even climate of the middle Pacific slope.

The girl endured the sultry latitudes philosophically, but Richard was continually putting up a kick, which, however, didn't do him any good.

Soon after getting below the line Richard began to show an interest in the whereabouts of the ship.

Every day at noon the captain took his bearings by the sun, and then marked the position of the Golden Fleece on the chart.

Richard managed to be present when he did it, and the boy showed an increasing interest as the vessel drew nearer and nearer to the vicinity of the Fiji Islands.

He reported the ship's progress and her position day by day to Bill Blaine, either when he was at the wheel, or on some part of the deck.

His intimacy with that individual was remarked by the chief mate, who spoke to the captain about it.

Nellie had long since noticed it and mentioned its singularity to her father.

"He won't have anything to do with Jack, who saved his life, and is a boy of his own age," she said. "Yet with all his high-toned ideas he has made friends with that Blaine, whom you saved from the sea when we were a week out from

San Francisco. I cannot understand what interests him in that wicked-looking sailor."

"Nor I," replied her father, evidently annoyed. "I shall have to speak to him about it."

He did at the first opportunity, but Richard received his remonstrance in a sulky way.

He maintained his right to speak to anybody he chose on the ship, and as an excuse for talking to Blaine in particular, said that the sailor told very interesting stories, and he liked to listen to them.

The Fiji group lay in longitude 180; latitude about 18 S. This fact Richard had communicated to Blaine.

One morning when the ship was bowling along within 300 miles of Papua Island the discovery was made that all the water casks were nearly empty.

The captain received the intelligence in some astonishment.

An investigation was ordered.

The chief mate and the carpenter conducted it.

They found that all the big casks, which were securely lashed on deck, had been punctured at the bottom by holes made by a large gimlet, and that the water had leaked out of the barrels into the scuppers unnoticed.

Clearly someone aboard had done this, but who the guilty party was, or what his object could be, it was impossible to determine, although Bill Blaine was suspected.

His bunk was quietly searched on the chance of finding the gimlet, but nothing came of it.

The captain was duly informed of the state of affairs, while the carpenter proceeded to plug up the holes in order to save the water that still remained in the casks.

Every member of the crew, including Blaine, was interviewed separately, and asked if he had seen any one creeping around the barrels during the night watches.

Butch Whitbeck and Jack had both seen Blaine lying apparently asleep between the barrels on different nights, and told the captain so.

Other members of the chief mate's watch, to which Blaine belonged, had also noticed the derelict hugging the barrels at night.

As a result of this testimony Blaine was believed to be the guilty man.

The chief mate tried to frighten a confession from him, but failed.

The rascal admitted that he had stowed himself around the casks frequently during the time he was on watch, but denied that he had tampered with the barrels.

As no proof could be brought against him nothing could be done to punish him.

After Captain Rockwell took his sights that day at noon, and had worked out the vessel's position and marked it on the chart, he ordered her course changed for the Island of Papua.

He might have selected one of the other islands for the purpose of taking water aboard, but as Richard Savage had expressed a wish to visit Papua he thought he would oblige him.

At dinner that day he told Richard that, owing to the unaccountable leakage of their water casks, he would anchor close in to the Island of Papua to take a fresh supply aboard.

Richard heard this with great joy, and subsequently

passed the information on to Blaine, who stuck his tongue in his cheek and winked his wicked eye after a knowing manner.

On the afternoon of the following day the island showed itself on the horizon and the ship approached its shores rapidly.

At sundown the Golden Fleece was within a mile of the island, and then the last of the breeze left her.

Her sails hung motionless from the yards, while the vast ocean around her gradually subsided into a surface unbroken by a single ripple.

With the island close aboard, and the red face of the sun just vanishing behind the far-off water-line, the vessel looked like "a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

If it had been hot before, while the ship was bowling along under the influence of a steady wind, it was seemingly twice as hot with the air stagnant, even though the sun had gone to rest.

Darkness fell suddenly, with very little intervening twilight, in that latitude, but the unclouded sky was so brilliant with stars, that one could see a considerable distance.

The island stood well defined before the gaze of all on board, and no one seemed to take such interest in it as Richard Savage.

Orders were given to unship the water casks in readiness for their transportation to the shore at sunrise, and this work was soon accomplished.

Short as the job was, the men perspired freely at it.

The boats were also cleared away, and now hung from their davits in readiness to be lowered at a moment's notice.

While the captain, chief mate and his passengers were at supper, Jack and Butch hung lazily over the bulwark, gazing at the island.

"So that's Papua," said Whitbeck. "One of the cannibal islands?"

"Yes, but the missionaries have about done away with those human barquets that used to be a regular feature of the Fiji group."

"That's right, I guess; but many a missionary, I've heard, has been served up as a choice morsel for the chiefs before the practice was practically abolished."

"That's no lie, Butch. Twenty years and more ago shipwrecked sailors had every chance of going to pot here, as the saying is."

"Don't let's talk about it. You make my flesh creep," said Butch.

"Well, my hearties," said a voice behind them at that moment, "how does the island strike you?"

They did not need to turn around to recognize the speaker.

It was Bill Blaine.

"In this light it looks like any other island of a similar size," replied Jack.

"Are ye thinkin' of the cruise ye promised to make with me to the island of the secret caves?" chuckled Blaine.

"No, we are not thinking about anything so absurd," replied Jack, impatiently.

"Oh, ye ain't? Ye've not forgotten yer promise, have ye, that ye'd go if we got to Papua, or some other island near it? Ye remember makin' it, don't ye, that night I told ye the story of them lather-baskets of gold coin stowed away in the caves?"

Like a flash the promise came to them at that moment—a promise they never expected to be in a position to fulfill.

And now, after all, here they were at Papua, and the rascal was making it plain that he intended to hold them down to their word.

The boys were confounded, and gazed at each other in the dusk in a kind of dismay, for though there might be a million in gold at the island of the secret caves they were not infatuated with the idea of going after it.

"Well, supposing we did promise, and admitting that we have gone to Papua, where's the craft to be found to take us to your island?"

"Leave that to me, my hearties," said Blaine. "The craft ain't sich a great way off that'll do the trick in ship-shape fashion. Jest remember that there's several bushel-baskets of shinin' gold waitin' for each of us in that there island of the caves. That ought to make ye lick yer chops. Think of what ye kin lay with it! Ye won't need to work 'board an old hooker like this no more. Ye'll never want for nothin' as long as ye live."

The picture the artful rascal drew of the advantages of wealth quickened the boys' blood.

Where is there a man or boy who can resist the call of the yellow metal, or the silver metal, either?

Money, even though it be legalized paper, has a magnetism second to nothing else.

Jack and Butch now began to think with some seriousness about the alleged baskets of coin on the island of the secret caves.

Bill Blaine, perceiving that he had aroused their interest at last, moved away to consider his plans for the morrow.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAPPED.

Jack and Butch talked the situation over after Blaine left.

"I believe there's something in this thing; after all," said Whitbeck. "That chap wouldn't be so bent on going to the island if he wasn't almost cock-sure that there's gold there. And why shouldn't there be loads of it there if it once was the haunt of the south sea pirates? Those chaps didn't have much chance to spend their plunder. Well, if they didn't spend it, and it was not recovered by somebody long ago, it's there yet. The more I think about the matter the more I'm in favor of taking a sly at it. Here I'm working for a measly \$20 a month and my keep. So are you. Think about basketsful of gold, why, if I was sure of getting a tin pail full of yellow boys I'd be satisfied to make the trip. I tell you, Jack, this matter is well worth considering."

"Yes, that's all right. It wouldn't make so much difference to you if you did quit the ship right here. You've merely got your wages at stake, which you'd probably lose for breaking your contract with the vessel. It's different with me. Captain Rockwell is my friend and backer. He's taken an interest in me from the start. He would consider it base ingratitude on my part to skip away with you and Blaine, and perhaps another hand, for Blaine hinted that a fourth person was likely to go on this trip, and leave him short-handed in mid-Pacific. I tell you, Butch, money has as much attraction for me as for any one else; but there's something more valuable even than money."

"What's that?" asked Butch.

"A fellow's honor."

Four bells sounded the end of the first dog-watch, and the watch on deck was called to supper.

After Jack finished his meal he got permission from the captain to join Nellie and Richard on the poop.

The latter had scarcely spoken to him since the day he claimed that Jack had insulted him at the wheel, now he surprised Archer by addressing him in a very friendly manner.

Both Jack and Nellie regarded his sudden change of front with some surprise, but nevertheless they were pleased that he had shaken off his distant ways.

Of course they could not be expected to know that Richard was acting in conformity with instructions he had received from Bill Blaine, who had directed him to get on pleasant terms with Jack Archer for politic reasons.

Richard talked eagerly about the visit he expected to pay to the island next morning, while the crew were filling the water casks, which was expected to take them at least half a day.

Nellie said she'd be delighted to go ashore with him; but somehow or another Richard objected to her company.

"It will be too hot for you in the sun, Miss Nellie," he said. "Besides Ben Blaine is going with me, and you don't like his company, you know."

"I don't believe papa will let you go with Blaine," pouted the girl.

"Yes, he will, for I'm going to have Jack and his chum Whitbeck to help row the boat."

"Well, if Jack is going with you I want to go too," she persisted. "I shall ask papa to let me. I can stand the sun as well as you. I haven't made half the fuss over the tropical weather that you have over since we got near the equator. If you don't want my company, Jack will take me off your hands when we land, won't you, Jack?"

"Sure, I will," replied Jack.

In the face of the girl's persistency he didn't know what to do, and decided that he would have to see Blaine about it the first thing in the morning.

Accordingly, he got up earlier than was his custom and sought Bill Blaine, who had just finished doing his share of washing down the deck.

He told the sailor that the captain's daughter insisted on going ashore with them to see the island.

"She does, eh?" growled Blaine. "Well, we can't have her, d'ye understand?"

"I don't see how I can shake her off if her father gives her permission to go with us," replied Richard.

"Ye've arranged with the skipper to have me, Archer and Whitbeck in the boat, haven't ye?"

"That's all right, and we're to leave the ship about after breakfast is over in the cabin."

"If the gal says she's comin' with us we'll take her over to where the men are filling the casks. We'll get her ashore there and then give her the ship. I'll back up me yon to induce her to wait with the men to clear till we get back. Then we won't come back," grinned Blaine. "We'll keep on rowin' till we reach the cove where the native village is, and where I expect to find the preacher we're going to take to sail to the island where the gold is."

The crew had their own part to play, with the excep-

tion of Blaine, Jack and Whitbeck, set off in two boats for the shore, towing an empty cask each.

The working gang was in charge of the second mate, and they were soon ashore and occupied with the business in hand.

After breakfast was over in the cabin, Richard came on deck, prepared to accompany Blaine and the two sailor lads to the shore.

Nellie, having gotten permission from her father to go, too, also appeared with a wide straw hat on her shapely head.

Jack helped her into the boat as it hung at the davits.

Richard also got in and sat down near her.

Then the boat was lowered to the water.

Jack and Butch slid down the falls, and Blaine came last. They shoved off and headed shoreward.

The island was a good-sized one, and the Golden Fleece lay off the uninhabited part of it.

As they neared the shore a most remarkable spectacle of island scenery was presented to their eyes.

The ground rose abruptly from a wide, sandy beach in conical hills, with abrupt precipices, and crags of rock frowning down like olden battlements.

Down a deep, ravine-like indentation ran a stream of water, which was divided into a score of streams by shattered rocks here and there.

One of these branches emptied near the beach, and there the crew of the ship was filling one of the barrels.

Bill Blaine directed the boat to this point and beached her nose.

At a nod from the sailor Richard stepped ashore and assisted the girl out.

They walked up to where the men were holding the cask under the stream.

The rocks cast a delightful shade, and Nellie was helped to a seat by the mate.

After the lapse of five minutes Blaine called out to Richard, and he went down to the boat.

"Get aboard and we'll go along the shore a bit," said the sailor.

"Call Nellie," said Jack.

"Oh, never mind her," said Richard. "We'll be back in a little while."

Blaine pushed off and directed the course of the boat along close to the shore.

After proceeding about a quarter of a mile the aspect of the island began to change.

The barren rocks and fantastic heights melted away gradually into picturesque cocoanut groves, clumps of bread chestnuts, stately palms and bread-fruit trees, and groves of graceful bananas, all forming, with the wild beauty of the shore, and the far-stretching green beyond, pictures of surprising beauty.

They had already lost sight of the watering party, and a deep indentation in the shore carried them out of view of the ship as well.

Blaine, who was pulling the forward oars and guiding the boat to suit himself, aimed for a wide cleft in the rocks.

As they approached the place it was seen to form a good opening, and they were soon in the water, but only with a few feet to run to get to the boat again.

Once in it there was no space to turn around, and they had to keep straight on.

It wound in a serpentine way through a high point of the ground, which entirely cut off their view.

Jack and Butch were wondering when the long passage was going to end, and why Blaine had entered it, when the boat suddenly shot out into a small harbor at the end of the island opposite to that where the ship was anchored.

The shore and immediate vicinity was covered with rude huts occupied by natives, while in the center of a large open space stood the house of the missionary, who appeared to be the boss of the village.

A number of native craft were tied to the beach or anchored close by.

In their midst was a small, shapely schooner, with a cut-water as sharp as a knife, while her two short masts had a decided rake.

She looked as if she had been built for speed.

Blaine headed the rowboat directly for this craft, and as they drew near to her a man, whose face, if anything, was more villainous-looking than Blaine's, came up out of her small trunk cabin and looked over the side at the boat.

"Hello, shipmate," he sung out to Blaine; "where in thunder have you been all this time? I thought you'd given me the shake for good, and gone after that treasure on your own hook. But it wouldn't have done you no good, for you never could have found the secret caves without my help."

"Me shake you, Williams!" replied Blaine. "What d'ye think I am? I was carried north to the neighborhood of the Sandwich Islands by a brig I boarded."

"You was, eh?"

"I was, shipmate. Then the brig foundered and I would have gone to Davy Jones' locker if it hadn't been that I floated out'r danger on a hencoop, the only survivor of the brig. I was picked up by an American hooker bound for Melbourne."

"And where did you leave her?"

"On the other side of the island, where they are takin' aboard fresh water."

"You don't say! Step aboard, for I want to talk to you."

"I'm goin' to."

Blaine boarded the schooner and entered the cabin with the man, who appeared to belong to the vessel.

They were below a good twenty minutes, during which interval the three boys amused themselves looking at the native village.

When Blaine finally reappeared with the other chap he told the boys to get on board the schooner.

Richard obeyed at once, but Jack and Butch objected.

"Ye needn't remain but a minute, my hearties," said Blaine, with a treacherous gleam in his eye.

As Richard was on the schooner the other two were finally persuaded to leave the rowboat.

"How d'ye like this craft, anyway?" Blaine asked Jack.

"She looks to be a fast sailor," replied the boy, who had figured that fact up in his mind when he first saw her.

"Ye kin bet she is. This here is the hooker I told ye that I had ready to carry us to the island of the secret caves."

"Is that so?" asked Jack. "Well, just cut me out, will you?"

"Cut ye out!" replied Blaine, with a wicked laugh. "I

should say not. We've got to have a navigator, and ye are the boy for our money."

"I tell you I'm not going," replied Jack, resolutely.

"Ye are not goin', eh? I say ye are goin'," said Blaine, in a threatening tone.

"Come on, Butch," said Jack, coolly. "Let's get out of this. Come along, Richard. We're going back to the ship."

Blaine grinned in an ugly way.

While he had been speaking to Jack, Williams, the other rascally-looking chap, had moved over to the side of the vessel, unshipped the rope which held the rowboat and cast it off, thus letting the small craft go adrift.

Consequently, when Jack and Butch reached the spot they saw the boat out of their reach.

"What does this mean?" demanded Jack, angrily. "Do you expect to detain us against our will?"

"If ye two won't go willin'ly, ye'll go unwillin'ly. But go ye will, as sure as my name is Bill Blaine."

"We'll see about that," replied Jack, with a determined air. "I'll let no man, or rascal like you, walk on my neck if I can help myself. Follow me, Butch. We'll have to swim for that boat."

He made a dash to spring overboard when Williams, who had been watching him like a hawk, flung a heavy wooden belaying-pin at his head.

The blow took effect, and Jack went down on the deck stunned.

At the same time Bill Blaine sprang at Whitbeck and knocked him down.

Before the dazed young sailor could recover his faculties Blaine and Williams were tying his hands behind his back.

They treated the insensible Jack the same way.

Then they lifted each in turn and carried them down into the small forecabin forward, which was a dingy hole not much larger than a good-sized drygoods case.

Slamming the scuttle down over their heads, the rascals secured it by means of a hasp and staple.

Having thus obtained the upper hand of their victims, they proceeded to cast loose the stops of the mainsail.

They hoisted this sail to the light breeze, and set the single jib.

Then they raised the anchor by means of a small horizontal drum windlass.

As soon as the anchor left the bottom the schooner began to drift with the tide toward the entrance of the little harbor.

The last thing the rascals did was to set the spanker, or aftermost sail, by hauling up the gaff as far as it would go.

Bill Blaine took charge of the wheel and steered the schooner out on the bosom of the broad Pacific, pointing her nose to the southeast.

The rascal was now in great good-humor, for all his plans had succeeded to the letter, and he began to tell Williams about his adventures since the two parted company several weeks before.

CHAPTER X.

SAILING FOR THE ISLAND OF THE SECRET CAVES.

No attention was paid to Richard Savage, who, left to himself, walked aimlessly about the deck and finally seated himself on the rise of the cabin roof, with his back against the skylight.

Although he had been a witness to the treatment Jack and Butch Whitbeck had received from the two rascals, he had not put up the slightest remonstrance.

It wouldn't have made any difference if he had done so.

However, he had no interest in either of the young sailors, and in addition he entertained a personal grouch against Jack, so it didn't worry him in the least how the two rascals treated the boys.

He understood that Blaine was using them only for his own purpose, and that they were not to get any of the gold that he implicitly believed was hidden away in the secret caves of the island they were now bound for.

He congratulated himself over the fact that he would get a third of the treasure at any rate, and he began to build air castles about the money.

If he had only known that he was practically in the same spot with Jack and Butch, and that Blaine and Williams had not the slightest intention of dividing any of the gold with him, it would have greatly changed his views of the situation.

They simply meant to use him to strengthen their own side against Jack and Butch, and when the job had been put through they intended to abandon him to his own resources, the same as they proposed to treat the other two.

In other words, once they had the gold aboard the schooner they were going to maroon the three boys on the island of the secret caves to shift for themselves, and then sail back for one of the Fiji islands, take aboard a supply of provisions and set sail for New Zealand.

In the meanwhile Whitbeck came around soon after he and his companion had been put under hatches.

The blow Blaine gave him was a heavy one, and his head ached from the effects of it.

"The blamed rascals have got us dead to rights," he muttered, angrily. "I can hear them getting the schooner under way. Once they get off shore that will settle our chances of getting back in a hurry. I don't see but Jack and me had better make the best of things, help these chaps run the schooner to that treasure island, and if there's any gold there take our share, according to agreement."

The sunshine, stealing into the contracted fore-castle, if such a hole could be called by that name, showed him the unconscious form of his friend.

"It's hot as blazes down here," he muttered, as he set about the task of reviving Jack. "If they keep us very long down here we'll be baked as if we were in an oven."

In a little while Jack recovered his senses and sat up.

"Well, old man," said Butch, "you've woke up at last."

"Woke up!" repeated Jack, in a dazed kind of way.

"Have I been asleep?"

"Kind of. You were laid out by a wooden belaying-pin."

It was some moments before Jack comprehended the situation, then everything came back to him.

"Where the deuce are we, Butch?"

"Why, aboard the schooner, of course. They put us down in this hole forward to give us to understand that our name is Mud, and that we've got to knockle down to them. They've got the vessel under way. Don't you feel the motion?"

It didn't take Jack but a moment to understand that he and Butch were in the mercy of Bill Blaine and his rascally companion, and the assurance was not a pleasant one.

"What did they do to Savage?"

"Blessed if I know. He didn't put up any fight, so maybe they didn't do anything to him."

"If they're carrying him off as well as us he must have a fit," said Jack, ignorant of the fact that Richard had been standing in with Blaine right along.

At this point the scuttle was unfastened and thrown open.

The boys looked up and saw the wicked countenance of Bill Blaine looking down at them in triumph.

"Well, my hearties, how are ye feelin' now?" he asked, with a grin.

"Are you going to let us out, or roast us for dinner?" growled Butch.

"That depends on whether ye are ready to listen to reason or not," replied the sailor.

"What do you want?" demanded Jack, in a very bad humor.

"Ye know what I want without me tellin' ye ag'in. I want ye to navigate this schooner to the island where the gold is. Ye might as well agree, 'cause ye can't get back to yer ship now till the job is over. Besides, ye are goin' to git a fair share of the coin that's on the island."

"If there's any there."

"It's there, my hearty, or we wouldn't be goin' after it. Now, then, are ye goin' to jine with us and take yer share, or are ye goin' to ride rusty and force us to keep yer under hatches till ye diskiver there ain't no use buttin' ag'in a stone wall? If yer sensible I know what yer answer'll be."

"I don't see that we can help ourselves," replied Jack. "You're some distance off shore by this time, I suppose, and we can't leave the schooner."

"We're about two mile from the island, headin' sou'east."

"All right," said Jack. "We'll give in."

"Ye'll navigate the craft, will ye? We've got a chart and a quadrant in the cabin. Yer'll do yer best, will ye?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"Now yer talkin', my hearty," replied Blaine, in a tone of satisfaction. "Ye are one of us and share ekally with the others."

"What others? Your pal?"

"Him and Richard Savage."

"So Savage will come in, too, eh?" said Jack, in surprise.

"He'll have to work for it. He ain't a sailor, but he kin help carry the stuff aboard the schooner arter we find it. I reckon yer ship will wait at the island now till he gits back. That's a p'int I guess ye didn't figger on. As he's the owner's son the cap'n ain't likely to abandon him. So ye see there's no danger of ye losin' yer ship arter all."

That was certainly a comforting reflection for Jack and Butch, and went a long way toward reconciling them to the situation.

Blaine cut their arms loose and they came on deck.

The first thing they did was to look for the island and the ship.

Both were in sight, the Golden Fleece being all of two and a half miles distant.

"Come into the cabin and let's git down to business," said Blaine.

Jack, to whom the words were addressed, followed him below.

Blaine pulled a chart out of a locker and opened it out on the table.

"This here is a chart of this part of the ocean," he said. "That there island is Papua. That black mark represents about where the island is we're goin' to. It's only a small island, and if me and Williams tried to find it off-hand like, we'd be more'n likely to miss it. Now here's the latitude and longitude of it. Ye, with yer knowledge of navigation, ought to be able to take the schooner right to it."

"How far to the sou'east of Papua is it in a general way?" asked Jack.

"About a hundred miles or so."

"With this light breeze we're not likely to cover that distance before this time to-morrow, so we won't pass it in the night. All we can do now is to keep right on as we're heading, as long as the island lies, in a general way, to the sou'east. To-morrow noon I'll take a sight and determine our position, and after that we'll work the schooner to the exact latitude and longitude you've marked down here."

"That's the ticket," said Blaine, nodding his head. "I know'd that ye could do it. It's a fine thing to be able to navigate a craft and make her go right where ye want her to."

The chart was put away, and shortly afterward the rascal Williams came below and laid out the table for dinner.

The repast was a very simple one, consisting of some rich yams, bread-fruit, bananas, and a refreshing, but intoxicating, native beverage called yugena.

Jack and Butch drank sparingly of the latter stuff, but Richard and the two men got away with a good bit of it.

Blaine and Williams were not much affected by their potations, because they were used to it, but Richard did not fare so well.

It took so much effect on him that in half an hour he was stupidly drunk, and he did not fully recover his normal senses until the next morning.

Jack, Butch, Blaine and his associate took two-hour spells at the wheel in turn, while the schooner sailed toward her destination at the rate of something less than ten miles an hour on the average.

Next day at noon Jack calculated the position of the schooner after using the quadrant, and marked it on the chart.

He found that the little craft was about thirty nautical miles from the point where the island was supposed to be.

He altered the schooner's course to conform to the new conditions, and told Blaine that they ought to sight the island about four o'clock at their present rate of sailing.

The rascal was well satisfied with this information.

He slipped Jack on the back, told him that he was all right, and then went to the wheel to communicate the good news to Williams.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISION OF LOVELINESS.

The schooner continued on friendly terms with Jack and Butch, and the three boys kept to themselves, having little to say to the two men.

Jack, when he put the chart away after making his calculations at noon, discovered a small revolver in the locker.

Although he judged it belonged to Williams, he took possession of it on general principles, for he had very little confidence in the propriety of the ship's company, since he had yielded to their demands.

"It's always well to be on the safe side, if possible, and this gun may come in quite handy before this adventure is over," he said to himself.

As the afternoon passed away Blaine and Williams took turns in sweeping the distant sea-line with a ship's glass for a sign of the island.

At length, about three o'clock, Blaine, who was using the telescope, saw a small, cloud-like object lying upon the horizon.

Thereafter he and Williams did not lose sight of it for more than half a minute at a time.

It wasn't long before they made it out to be an island, and they had little doubt but that it was the one they were in quest of.

The boys were naturally much interested in the distant isle, but their interest was chiefly centered in the treasure they expected to find there.

Richard grinned to himself as he listened to Jack and Butch figure up what was likely to be the size of their shares.

"I wouldn't give much for what you'll get out of the treasure," he thought, with much satisfaction, for it pleased him to feel that the young sailors were going to get badly left, according to Blaine's programme, as he understood it.

At five o'clock they could see the island quite plainly.

It was hilly and rugged-looking, but the low ground was covered with rich vegetation, amid which plantain and coconut trees predominated.

The sun was setting by the time they were close aboard of the tropical isle, and it was almost dark when they made their way through an opening in the reef surrounding it and cast anchor in a little cove with a wide, sandy beach.

"We can't do nothin' to-night," said Blaine, "so we'll pipe to supper. We'll have to set a regular watch, because this here island is inhabited, and as there ain't no missionary here to boss the natives there ain't no sayin' what kind of a reception we might get if they took it into their ugly heads to pay us a visit."

This piece of information was not very palatable to the boys.

They had not figured on having a clash with the inhabitants of the island, having been impressed with the idea that the natives were friendly toward whites.

"I wonder how Blaine and Williams expect to bring that gold off, provided they find their way into the secret caves, without the natives getting wind of the operation?" remarked Jack.

"Give it up," replied Whitbeck, rather solemnly. "I'm thinking this job isn't going to be so easy as Blaine cracked it up to be. He ought to have brought a small arsenal along so that we could defend ourselves if attacked. To tell you the truth, I'm beginning to wish that I was out of this scheme. If a fellow has got to risk his life for the mere chance of getting rich, I hardly think it's a paying risk."

Richard didn't say anything, but he was decidedly uneasy at the prospect ahead.

He kept casting anxious glances shoreward through the gloom, and his excited fancy peopled the midnight

with a crowd of copper-skinned rascals cannibalistically inclined, watching the schooner and making plans to capture all on board.

Butch Whitbeck remained on deck while the rest went to supper.

All meals were alike on board the schooner, the only difference being in the name applied to them, for there was no change in the food.

The breeze, which had almost died out with the sun, came on again from another quarter about an hour after dark, and made the sultry air fairly bearable.

The sky was bright with stars, as usual, and their radiance made the island stand out in relief.

Not a sound could be heard other than the low beat of the surf upon the reefs, which almost surrounded the island.

"Well, Richard, how do you suppose you'll feel if the inhabitants of this place capture us on our gold-hunting expedition to-morrow?" said Jack, noticing how nervous the young aristocrat appeared to be. "Would you sooner be roasted, boiled or fricasseed?" he added, with a chuckle.

"I don't see anything funny about the matter," grumbled Richard. "I wish I was back on board the Golden Fleece."

"You aren't the only one who wishes that, old man. Butch has been shaking in his shoes ever since Blaine said that he wasn't sure what kind of a reception we might get from the natives if they discovered us."

"Oh, you go bag your head," growled Whitbeck. "I ain't shaking any more than you are. I'm ready to take my chances with the rest. I wish I had a good gun, though. I'd feel a little more secure."

"I think a Gatling rapid-firer wouldn't be out of place," said Jack. "It would make a crowd of warlike cannibals look like thirty cents inside of a couple of minutes."

"Do you think these islanders are cannibals?" asked Richard, in shaky tones. "I thought the natives of these islands were all converted."

"You'd better ask Blaine. He can tell you more about this part of the world than I can. If he really thought the inhabitants of this island were very dangerous I don't think he'd have taken the chances of coming here for a gold mine. I know I wouldn't. Money is all very well, but a fellow's life is more valuable," said Jack.

"These are my sentiments, too," interjected Butch, with a nod of his head.

The boys talked till they grew sleepy, and then they turned in after Jack was told that he would have to stand watch from midnight till three, and Butch was informed that he would have to hold the deck from three until relieved.

Soon after sunrise Blaine and Williams stepped out of their bunks.

After breakfast both appeared on deck with rifles in their hands.

A third rifle was handed to Richard.

"We're going to leave ye in charge of the schooner," said Blaine. "If any of the natives try to board the vessel you must wave 'em off. If they won't obey ye, jest shoot 'em, d'ye understand?"

Richard said he understood, but he didn't look very formidable even with the gun in his hands, and Jack thought the resistance he would put up if attacked would not amount to a whole lot.

The rowboat that the schooner carried on her deck was lowered into the water and the party of four rowed away, leaving Savage lord of all he surveyed.

When the boat touched the beach all jumped out, and she was secured to a stake driven into the sand.

Blaine and Williams took the lead with their guns ready for business at a moment's notice.

Jack and Butch trailed on close behind.

In that order they walked up the shore, and penetrating the underbrush, started inland.

The rascals seemed to have a well-defined idea of where they were heading for.

They talked together in low tones, but neither Jack nor Butch could catch what they said.

In fact, their attention was taken up by a constant lookout for the appearance of any stray inhabitants of the island.

Not a sign of life, other than birds of variegated plumage, was to be seen, however.

They proceeded in this manner through a comparatively level district covered with a luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation for a distance of perhaps half a mile.

Then they drew near to a circle of hills, rising in a singularly abrupt fashion, not unlike the walls of some huge fortress.

To climb these elevations looked to be simply impossible.

Blaine and his companion evidently had no intention of attempting such a thing, but, instead, they began to advance along their base with some caution, peering into every bunch of underbrush they came to, and around every projection they encountered in their path.

"I'll bet they're looking for the opening to the secret caves," said Jack, after taking note of the actions of the two rascals.

"Of course that's what they're doing," replied Whitbeck.

"If this island is inhabited it seems funny that we haven't met with a single specimen of the natives," said Jack.

"Their village may be on the other side of the island."

"It certainly does not appear to be on this side," admitted Jack, "else we must have seen some indications of the fact."

"These hilly elevations run clear across the island and bar approach to the other end, except by way of the beach."

"That's what they do. I should hate to have to climb them. In fact, I doubt very much if we could do such a thing without a regular mountain-climber's outfit."

At that moment Blaine and Williams came to a sudden stop before a clump of tropical bushes.

They parted the foliage with evident caution and looked through.

Then, motioning to the boys to keep close behind, they pushed their way through.

Jack and Butch followed.

Suddenly they appeared to be walking straight into the hill.

In another moment they found themselves in a tunnel which was as dark as the ace of spades.

They followed the windings of this for some little distance and then they saw light ahead.

That indicated the end of the tunnel.

When they came to the point of exit they found them-

selves gazing into a small amphitheater-like space open to the sky.

Plantain trees were growing around it at such regular intervals as seemingly to indicate that they had been set there by human hands.

The ground was thickly carpeted with verdure, but instead of growing wild as in the other part of the island they had traversed, it was cut close like a well-kept lawn around a gentleman's house.

A stream of water of small volume leaped from crag to crag at one side of the enclosure until it reached a kind of basin, partly natural and partly formed by man.

Sitting on a rock beside this crystal pool and arranging her long, golden locks was a young, slender girl of uncommon beauty.

She was dressed in soft, flowing, white garments, caught at the waist by a girdle of pure gold, which glittered with a myriad of diamonds.

A pair of white sandals protected her exquisitely-formed feet.

Around her neck and hanging down nearly to her waist was a pendant chain formed of a combination of large diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones.

A sort of tiara, in the center of which shone an immense ruby, was affixed in the top of her hair, while rings of great value glittered on her taper fingers.

She was entirely alone to all appearances, and the intruders regarded her with surprise and not a little wonder.

Blaine and Williams were not impressed by her artless loveliness, but by the immense value of her ornaments, which clearly looked to be worth several large fortunes.

The boys, on the contrary, while sensible of the glittering character of her gems, were spell-bound at the presence of such a beautiful white girl in that rugged, garden-like spot.

Jack was especially taken with her.

As she sat there in graceful unconsciousness that her privacy was invaded by strangers, two of whom were as big a pair of rascals as the sun ever shone upon, she presented a picture that completely captivated the young sailor.

It might almost be called a case of love at first sight on his part.

Blaine and his companion viewed her, as we have said, with merely mercenary emotions.

The wealth she carried on her person drove from their thoughts for the time being the money whose hiding place they were trying to locate.

They saw within their grasp the value in a very portable form of many thousands of golden coins, and with one accord they decided to seize the girl, choke her into helplessness, and strip her of every ornament.

This purpose was decided between them in whispers, and standing their rifles against the wall of the tunnel they crept out of the opening and cautiously approached the beautiful creature.

Jack was so absorbed in the contemplation of the girl's ravishing beauty, both of face and form, that he did not pay any attention to the actions of the two sailors until they came into his line of vision behind the girl.

Then instinctively he understood their object.

Forgetful of the circumstances surrounding him—conscious only of the peril that faced this lovely girl—all the natural chivalry of his manly nature at once asserted itself.

He sprang forward to her assistance as though she were his dearest friend and not an absolute stranger.

At that moment Blaine seized her roughly with a strangle hold around the neck while Williams started to tear the ornament from her hair.

His fingers had barely touched it when Jack struck him a swinging blow in the jaw that sent him reeling to the grass.

Then he tore Blaine's clutch from around the girl's throat, and smashed him, too, a stunning blow in the face.

Throwing one arm protectingly around the dazed and astonished girl, Jack drew his revolver and put himself in a posture to defend her from further aggression.

CHAPTER XII.

TITANIA.

Williams sprang to his feet with a fierce imprecation, which was echoed by Bill Blaine as that rascal also recovered from the smash he had received from the plucky boy.

The sight of the revolver in Jack's hand alone deterred them from throwing themselves upon him and doing him up in their rage.

"Ye blamed young monkey, what do ye mean by slugging us?" roared Blaine, in a furious passion, his wicked eyes sparkling with fury.

"Blame you!" snarled Williams. "We'll kill you for that!"

"Stand back!" cried Jack, resolutely. "If you move a step nearer I'll fire, and your blood will be on your own heads."

His manner and words showed that he meant business, and the rascals were loath to take the risk that seemed to be certain.

"How dare ye interfere with us?" demanded Blaine, fiercely. "Ye are one of us. What do ye mean by balkin' our plans?"

"Your plans have nothing to do with this girl. I did not agree to back you up in any such outrage against a defenseless woman as you have just attempted. You came to this island to search for hidden gold, not to assault and rob one of the inhabitants."

"We're not takin' any instructions from ye," blurted Williams. "Give that girl up to us or we'll carve ye into strips!"

The rascal drew his sheath-knife, and Blaine immediately followed his example.

"You'll reach this girl only over my dead body, you scoundrels," replied Jack, determinedly. "And before I go down one or both of you will get a ball into you that may settle your fate."

The discomfited rascals recognized the fact that lead travels quicker than steel, and they did not dare force the matter to an issue.

At this point Whitbeck, recovering from his surprise over what had happened, grabbed up one of the rifles left by the scoundrels at the mouth of the tunnel, and came forward to the aid of his chum.

"Drop those knives, both of you," he said, covering Blaine and Williams with his weapon. "Drop them, quick, or there'll be something doing you won't like."

The rascals, perceiving themselves menaced from another

and unexpected quarter, gave utterance to a string of fierce invectives, and swore to be terribly revenged on both of the young sailors.

Their oaths and threats had no effect whatever on either Jack or Butch.

The villains, however, sullenly refused to give up their knives, returning them to their sheaths in a dogged manner.

During all this time the girl had stood a passive participant in the thrilling scene.

Recognizing Jack as one who had saved her from the ruffianly assault, and whose presence and weapon protected her from further harm at the hands of the scoundrels, she did not seek to withdraw herself from his encircling arm, even after she had fully recovered her self-possession.

When Jack saw that Blaine and Williams were effectually subdued for the time being, at any rate, he took his arm from around the girl's waist and turned to her.

"You are quite safe now, miss," he said, without considering whether she understood his words or not.

"I thank you for saving me from those men," she replied, in perfect English, flashing a look of gratitude and interest in his face that thrilled him, for her eyes were beautiful and expressive ones, and their glances went straight to his heart.

"You are welcome, miss. I am very glad to have been of service to you."

"What is your name, and whence do you come?" she asked, in her silvery tones.

"My name is Jack Archer. I am an American, from San Francisco."

"I, too, am an American," she replied, sweetly; "but this is my home. My name is Titania. I am queen of the Titanians, who inhabit this island."

"Titania!" exclaimed Jack. "And what is your other name?"

"That I may not tell you. What brought you to this island? It is not often that any one comes hither. Was it to get water for your ship?"

"No," replied Jack. "We did not come on a ship, but in a small schooner from the Island of Papua, about 100 miles to the northwest."

"What brought you to this island? There is nothing to repay your visit. My people do not encourage the presence of strangers. How came you to find the passage that leads to our dwelling place? Only once before did a stranger penetrate to this spot, and he did not well repay the hospitality which I, contrary to my people's wishes, extended to him."

"We came here for——"

Then Jack stopped, for it flashed across his mind that it might be unwise to admit the real object which had brought the party to the island.

The girl seemed to read his thoughts and smiled.

"Perhaps I can guess," she said. "The stranger who abused our hospitality has told that there is a treasure on this island, concealed in our secret caves, and you and these men came here to try and take it away. Am I not right?"

"I will not deny it," replied Jack, flushing guiltily. "We did come here to obtain the treasure, which we understand consists of many thousand pieces of gold coin. That rascal there, whom we, that is, the officers and crew of the ship Golden Fleece, bound from Frisco to Melbourne, and now

at the Island of Papua, rescued from the sea more than a thousand miles northeast from here, told my chum here and I the story of this gold. He induced us, by force, backed by his promise to give us an equal share of whatever treasure was secured, to accompany him on a schooner from Papua to this island. We anchored off the eastern end of the island last evening, and this morning the four of us came ashore to search for the hidden caves."

"Your search would have been in vain. You could not have passed these natural barriers of our dwelling place without discovery, and discovery might perhaps have meant a quick and sudden death. I alone, who could have saved you, would probably never have heard of your fate."

"Then I suppose there is nothing for us to do but to return to the schooner by the way we came," replied Jack, with a wistful and admiring look into her lovely face, which brought a heightened color to her cheeks. "I am afraid that will not be well for my companion and myself, particularly for me. I have foiled these two rascals in their attempt to rob you of your gems and ornaments. They will also hold me responsible for the failure of the enterprise as a whole. They are desperate rascals, as you may judge by their appearance and their actions. It is not improbable that my life, as well as that of my chum, may be sacrificed to their fury as soon as they get us in their power aboard the schooner. Under these circumstances I would ask your protection, as I have given you mine when you stood in need of it. I ask that we may be permitted to remain with your people until some passing vessel can be signalled to take us off."

"Your request is granted," she said, softly, taking his hand in hers. "My gratitude would not permit me to expose you to danger, and when I have told my people what I owe you they also will welcome you. You shall both remain as long as you wish, or as long as circumstances may compel you."

Jack brightened up at her words.

In a few short minutes this girl had produced such an impression on him that he would have regarded it as a misfortune to be obliged to leave her.

At that moment a young native girl appeared suddenly from behind a screen of tropical foliage which hid an inner passage.

She uttered a startled exclamation as her eyes lighted on the four strangers.

Titania turned and spoke some words to her in a strange, but musical, language.

She turned about instantly and disappeared.

"I thank you very much, Miss Titania," replied Jack, in answer to the girl's speech. "My chum and I will gratefully accept your hospitality until such time as an opportunity occurs for us to get away. As for those rascals, the sooner you get rid of them the better."

As he spoke several copper-colored natives, attired in short trousers and a kind of loose frock, very similar to the undress of an American naval officer, appeared from the inner passage.

They arranged themselves in line near Titania and bowed their heads respectfully to her.

She addressed them in the native language, pointing to Blaine and Williams, and finally to Butch Wadlock.

They bowed their heads again when she had finished.

Blaine and his companion, not liking the outlook, started for the mouth of the tunnel.

"Stop!" cried Titania, authoritatively, to them.

They paid no attention.

"Hold them up with your rifle, Butch," said Jack.

Whitbeck called on the rascals to stop, covering them with his weapon.

They did so, with very bad grace.

"Better get that other rifle in your possession, Butch," said Jack. "It's too dangerous a weapon for those rascals to have."

Whitbeck took the hint, moved over to the tunnel and secured it.

He brought it back and tossed it to Jack.

The queen of the Titanians then turned to Butch and told him to go with the party that would escort Blaine and Williams back to the beach near where the schooner lay at anchor, and after seeing that the rascals returned to their vessel he was to come back with the natives.

"All right," replied Whitbeck, glancing at Jack. "Why not come with me, old man?"

Titania shook her head and ordered the escort to proceed at once.

One of the natives, who appeared to have command of the others, spoke to his companions.

They marched toward the tunnel.

Two entered and disappeared.

The native looked at Blaine and Williams and motioned them to enter the passage.

Blaine turned a ferocious look on Jack.

"Ye've got the best of us, my hearty," he hissed; "but we're not done with ye yet, by a long chalk! We'll git ye yet, and when we do ye'll wish ye'd never been born!"

With this parting salute the two sailors walked off, accompanied by Butch Whitbeck and the copper-colored escort.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DAWN OF LOVE.

Left together, Titania turned to Jack, took his hand once more in hers and carried it to her lips.

"You are my guest, Jack Archer," she said, with a look that quickened the blood in his veins, and caused him to seize her hand and carry it to his own lips.

She smiled almost coyly and said, "Come."

He followed willingly enough as she led the way to the inner passage.

Her movements were graceful and supple as she preceded him along the natural passage open above until they entered a second winding tunnel which terminated in a large cave facing upon a valley completely enclosed by the inaccessible hills.

Several natives were sitting around the cave.

All sprang to their feet on the appearance of their queen, and saluted her with the most profound respect.

She passed on out of the cave with Jack at her side.

"This is the home of the Titanians," she said, waving her fair, undraped arm at a large collection of small thatched huts scattered about the tropical valley.

A part of the valley was under special cultivation, a species of maize being grown there, as Jack subsequently ascertained.

There were bread-fruit, plantain, banana and cocoanut trees on all sides.

Birds of brilliant plumage flew hither and thither, and seemed to be extremely tame.

The hillsides were resplendent with tropical vegetation of every description.

Everything spoke of peace, plenty and contentment.

Jack was delighted with the scene thus unfolded before his eyes.

It seemed to be a fitting setting for the lovely girl who reigned queen of that little community, cut off as it were from the rest of the world.

"My gracious!" exclaimed the young sailor. "I believe I could live here forever and be perfectly satisfied."

She turned a look of sweetness on the boy and smiled.

A soft light shone from her eyes as they rested with an eager longing on his handsome face, and strong, well-proportioned figure.

The color came and went in her cheeks and her bosom rose and fell like the undulations of the great ocean without.

Jack's eyes were at that moment taking in all the beauties of the valley, and he was not conscious of the emotions reflected in this innocent maiden's person, as she gazed at him with an admiring and newly-born interest.

"Come," she said at length, "I will take you to my house. There I hope you will find yourself at home until——"

She hesitated and her voice trembled a bit.

"Until you tire of us here," she added, "and long to return to those you love and who love you."

"There is no one that I love," he said, turning to her, "and no one who loves me. I am an orphan."

A bright light sprang into her eyes as he uttered those words.

"Then were you to remain with us no one would miss you?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, there are friends who would miss me in a way. Captain Rockwell, who has been almost a father to me, and his daughter Nellie, who has been almost a sister to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Titania, her face going pale. "They would miss you, you say, and you—you would miss them. This Nellie, who is like a sister to you—you care for her, no doubt? It would grieve you to see her no more, perhaps?"

"Sure, I care for her. She is the best, the truest hearted little girl in all the world," he said, enthusiastically. "I should not like to lose her altogether. She is the best friend I have. But she is not like—you."

Titania stood with averted face and sinking heart as Jack spoke with such fervor of Nellie Rockwell.

Her disappointment was keen until he said, "But she is not like—you."

At those words she raised her head and shot an indescribable glance at him.

"Come," she said, once more, "follow me."

She led him, an object of wondering curiosity to the men, women and children of the Titanians, along a wide lane through the village to a large thatched structure of a single story, which stood in the center of an extensive green space, well shaded by spreading palms.

There was no lack of ventilation in the building, a necessary requirement of that hot latitude.

The house consisted of one large central room, and three others that led off from it, like the pips of the ace of spades.

The furniture consisted of rustic-looking chairs, tables, lounges, and other civilized adjuncts, probably secured from wrecked ships.

The floor was constructed of the deck timbers of a large vessel, which had been as closely knit together as when they were in their original position.

The doorways were hidden by portieres of some soft, clinging silk—a fabric similar to that worn by the girl herself.

Coming out of the blazing sun, Jack was astonished at the comparative coolness of the big room to which Titania had introduced him.

Pointing to a couch made of interwoven cane, she called two of a half-dozen young female attendants and bade them bring refreshments.

Then she seated herself beside Jack and asked him to tell her something about himself, and of his voyage from San Francisco to the Island of Papua.

He complied at once, and while he was talking the two girls waited on them, one with golden and silver plates and dishes filled with tropical fruits, the other with an antique looking flagon filled with a rich amber-colored liquid which she served in a couple of silver goblets of exquisite workmanship to Titania and her visitor.

Jack was astonished at the display of plate until an explanation of their presence on this out-of-the-way island occurred to him.

Without doubt they were a part of the pirate booty of a hundred years since, which the girlish queen had turned to practical use.

Jack gave Titania an outline of his life history, and she listened to him with rapt attention.

When he spoke about Nellie Rockwell, and the warm friendship that existed between them, the girl watched his face narrowly, and weighed every word as it fell from his lips, as if to determine in her own mind just what place Nellie occupied in the boy's heart.

Sometimes her hand was pressed upon her bosom as if to stifle her emotion, and again her eyes sparkled with a dawning hope.

While they were thus engaged the escort of natives that had accompanied Blaine and Williams to the beach marched up to the house with Butch Whitbeck in their midst.

"Hello, Butch," exclaimed Jack, as soon as he saw his chum, "come in and make yourself at home."

"Draw up a chair, old man," continued Jack, as if he was the boss of the house, "and tell us how you got rid of those rascals."

"Oh, we got rid of them all right, don't you worry," laughed Butch, with an alarming glance at Titania. "We marched them back to the beach as if we were taking them to execution. They didn't say a thing about you—oh, no, of course not! I'd hate to have you meet either of those chaps of a dark night on a lonesome road. What they wouldn't do to you isn't worth mentioning. They called you every name in the calendar, and swore they'd kill you at the first chance they got. And I guess they wouldn't be bashful about treating me in the same way."

"See, old man," continued Butch, "this is the finest place I've ever seen. I wouldn't mind living here indefinitely."

"Wouldn't you? I feel kind of that way myself, only I'm afraid Miss Titania wouldn't stand for it."

"I should be very happy if you would remain here forever," she answered.

The look that accompanied her words thrilled Jack.

Butch saw it, too, and winked to himself.

"She looks as if she was sweet on Jack," he thought. "I'll bet if he says the word that he could have himself elected king of this island. Then I would have no difficulty in getting myself appointed chief cabinet minister, and I could boss it over these copper inhabitants to beat the band. They'd kowtow to Jack and the queen and salaam to me. Gee! That would be great, bet your life!"

Then Jack turned to Titania.

"I can't answer for my chum. He must speak for himself. As far as I'm concerned, I would be glad to stay here forever, under certain conditions."

"Under certain conditions?" murmured the girl, her color coming and going.

"Yes," replied Jack. "Under certain conditions. I can't very well tell you what those conditions are just now, but I may tell you later."

"I wonder if I hadn't better sneak?" thought Butch, feeling as if he was in the way.

He got on his feet, remarking that it was uncommonly warm, and started for the doorway, but Jack called him back.

"Don't go, old man," he said. "It's much cooler in this room than out under those trees. Besides, Miss Titania is going to tell us how she came to be queen of the Titanians, as well as other matters connected with the island."

So Butch sat down again and Titania began her story.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORY THAT TITANIA TOLD.

Titania's story was quite a long one as she related it, but a few words will place the substance of it before our readers.

Her father and mother were Americans, and she herself was born in California.

While yet a very little girl her father met with business reverses that reduced the little family to unpleasant straits.

A good position having been offered her father in Sidney, Australia, he set sail for the antipodes on an American ship, with his wife and child.

All went well until the vessel reached the neighborhood of the Fiji Islands, when she was caught in one of the periodical hurricanes that sweep those seas.

Driven southward in the grasp of the tempest, the vessel went ashore on the reefs surrounding the Island of Titania.

Strange to relate, all on board perished except Titania and her father and mother, who were washed up on the beach more dead than alive.

There they were discovered by the natives of the island, who carried them into their secluded village and treated them with great kindness, for the islanders were a simple and inoffensive race of aborigines who had settled there soon after the extinction of the pirate Vasquez and his villainous associates a hundred years before.

The Island of Titania lying out of the beaten track of vessels sailing between America and Australia, the girl

father waited long and anxiously for some craft to draw near enough to take them off.

As weeks passed into months few ships came within signalling distance, and none of these paid any attention or understood the signs made.

Gradually as time passed Titania's father and mother grew attached to the natives and contented with the simple and happy life led by those on the island, and imperceptibly they lost all desire to mingle again with the busy and sinful world of which they had once been a part.

Her father ceased to watch for vessels in the offing and both he and his wife devoted their lives from that time to teaching the inhabitants the Christian faith, and instructing them in such civilized pursuits as their limited facilities enabled them to put into practice.

They picked up the language of the Titanians, and taught the head people something of the English tongue.

Finally at the annual festival held by the natives Titania's father was made king of the island, her mother queen, and she herself declared the heir apparent.

A few years after this a brig was blown into the neighborhood by a gale and came to anchor within the reef.

The captain and crew of this craft were a rascally set.

It developed that they had been looking for this island, which they knew had once been the headquarters of the pirate Vasquez.

They believed that some of the booty of that famous rover might still be concealed on the island, and their purpose was to discover it and carry it away.

In searching the place they accidentally discovered the secret entrance to the valley and forced their way into the village.

In doing this they killed several of the islanders who had approached them with peaceful intentions.

Titania's father, while remonstrating with the invaders, was shot down in cold blood by the captain of the brig.

This wanton act naturally enraged the natives, a pitched battle ensued and the intruders were wiped out to a man.

The brig was taken possession of by the islanders, broken up and removed with her furnishings and such cargo as she had to the village, where the various articles were put to such use as the inhabitants could manage to employ them.

Titania's mother only survived her husband a short time, and the little girl, thus left an orphan, was duly proclaimed queen of the island under the name of Titania.

An old custom of the natives forbade her, on accession to the dignity of queen, from ever mentioning the name of her father and mother, and this custom she felt bound to respect, and consequently she could not impart that information to her guests, to whom, she said, she must ever be known simply as Titania.

"All right, Titania," said Jack, when she had concluded her story, "we'll let it go at that. Now, if you will favor us so much, will you tell us if there really is a large amount of gold coin concealed in secret caves on this island?"

"There is," she replied.

"That, as well as all these gems you wear, together with the gold and silver dishes, cups, flacons and other valuable articles we have seen, was once the plunder of that renowned rover of the seas, Vasquez, the Terrible?"

"It was," she answered.

"And where are these secret caves located, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"That no stranger is allowed to know. Even the natives, save six, who night and day guard the secret entrance, are not acquainted with the secret. I alone possess the right to enter the caves at will, and the six guards may accompany me or not, as I choose."

"Then, as long as you live no other eyes but yours, the guards excepted, can get a look at that treasure?" said Jack.

"One other may?"

"One other?" exclaimed Jack. "And who is that?"

"The man I choose for my husband and king."

"Gee! He'll be a lucky chap," said Whitbeck. "I wish I could step into his shoes," he added, with a grin.

"And your husband," said Jack, a bit anxiously, "must he be one of the natives, according to your code of law?"

"It is expected that he will be, since outsiders rarely enter the island, and none, save yourselves and the man who ill repaid our hospitality a year ago, has been permitted to enter the valley. There is no regulation, however, restricting my choice. Probably this is because I am the first maiden queen who ever reigned on the island."

Jack made no reply.

He sat silently gazing out through the doorway at the native children playing at a distance among the huts, thinking of the girl's strange and eventful story, and perhaps more of the girl herself—the most fascinating creature he had ever seen in his life, and whose personality had made a great impression on his heart.

And while the boy was occupied with his thoughts Titania rose and ordered dinner to be prepared for herself and her guests.

Then she sent for the three old and wise men of the village, who formed her council of state, as it were, according to the regulations governing the colony.

When they appeared she met them just outside the door, for they never entered her house.

To them she described how Jack Archer had saved her from being despoiled of her ornaments by Blaine and Williams, and how his chum, Butch Whitbeck, had helped him up.

She explained that the four had come to the island to search for the treasure of the secret caves.

Then she introduced her guests to the old men, indicating Jack as especially entitled to all honor and respect on the part of the inhabitants.

The old men departed and by the time Titania and her guests sat down to dinner the whole village knew what their queen owed to Jack, and incidentally his friend.

It is not too much to say that when, in the cool of the evening, the boys made a tour of the valley in company with Titania, Jack found himself a personage of no little importance, while Butch also came in for a goodly share of popular consideration.

Titania had been informed of the sailing of the schooner late in the afternoon, but lest this might be a mere ruse, a guard had been placed in the little amphitheater where the intruders had first seen the queen, with orders that would have brought strenuous consequences to Blaine and Williams had they dared to venture a second time upon their search for the secret caves.

One of the three rooms abutting upon the main apartment of the queen's house was allotted to Jack and Butch, and as it was the custom to go to rest soon after dark, the boys turned in immediately after Titania bade them good-night and retired to her own quarters.

CHAPTER XV.

A YOUNG GOLD KING.

The boys turned out early next morning just as the sun was rising.

The natives were just beginning to stir around as they came out of the house.

"I don't suppose breakfast will be ready for a couple of hours yet, so I move that we climb up the hill yonder and take a squint at the ocean," said Butch.

"I'm with you," replied Jack, and they started for the nearest point of the verdure-clad hills surrounding the village.

The slope was easy to climb and it did not take them long to reach the ridge.

From there they could see the Pacific rippling in the early sunshine spread out all around them clear to the encircling horizon.

"Seems as if we were on a great, big ship sailing along, doesn't it?" said Butch.

"Somewhat," replied Jack. "Just look down the sheer sides of these hills on the outside. It is just as if we were standing on the ramparts of an immense fort. These are the most extraordinarily formed hills I ever heard of. Precipitous and bare on the seaward side, like an iron-bound coast, while on the inside they are easy of ascent and covered with the most luxuriant of tropical vegetation. Nature does things in a fashion exclusively her own."

"Not a sail in sight. I suppose the schooner we came here on is half way back to Papua by this time. I wonder what kind of a time Savage is having with those rascals? They're in a pretty ugly humor, I'll warrant, because they had all their trouble for nothing. Savage will no doubt report to Cap'n Rockwell that we were captured and detained by the inhabitants of this island, and then we may expect to be flung down this way. Bill Blaine will hardly go back to the ship after what has happened. Probably he wouldn't return anyway, as I guess he and Williams hang around the Fiji group most of their time."

"I wouldn't care to be in Richard's shoes at the present moment," replied Jack. "Those scoundrels are probably making life hideous for him for want of something better to vent their disappointment on."

"Well, Jack, when our ship turns up, as I suppose she will, are you going back to sailing again?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"I didn't know but you might prefer to remain here, marry Titania, and become king of the island. It would be a dead easy life, and you'd come into possession of the treasure of the secret caves."

"How do you know she would marry me, or that the natives would accept me as their king?"

"Oh, she'll have you fast enough," replied Butch, nodding his head as if the matter was a foregone conclusion. "We're the first young white chaps she's ever seen, and as you're the smartest and best-looking, you've got the call."

If I were in your shoes I wouldn't hesitate a moment in taking up with a good thing."

Jack made no reply, and soon afterward they returned to the house to find Titania watching for them.

She smiled sweetly on Jack, as she wished him good-morning, and gave him every evidence of her favor.

After breakfast Titania asked Jack if he would like to accompany her on her morning walk to the pool in the amphitheater, where he had first seen her.

He said he would be glad to go, and so they set off together.

Passing through the cave and the winding passage they were presently seated on a smooth rock beside the pool.

"Tell me something about the great world beyond the seas—the country where I was born and yet left too early to have any remembrance of," said Titania, taking one of his hands in hers; "and about the other countries you have visited. What are they like? How do the people dress, and live, and amuse themselves? All I know about the world is what my father and mother told me, and I was then too young to understand fully what they said."

So Jack gave her a description of the world as he knew it—its sunshine and its shadows.

He told her that the main object to mankind seemed to be the accumulation of money, to which they made everything else subservient.

"The majority struggle hard for a bare living," went on Jack. "Captain Rockwell has followed the sea for forty years, and yet to-day he is only moderately well off. All the money he has ever made would probably not be sufficient to purchase a jewel similar to the one you are wearing above your forehead. Yet I am bound to say that he is about as contented with his lot as the average successful man. Some people, though they be worth the price of every gem you have on your person, and I should say their value represents a king's ransom, would not be satisfied—not if to them you added the treasure of the secret caves. Oh, this is a great world, Titania, and the more I see of its boasted civilization the less I like a large part of it. Here on this island, where money plays no part at all in your affairs, I find the simplicity positively refreshing. The natives seem to be content to get along without intercourse with outsiders. To all appearances they are happy, and what more can one wish for in life but happiness? As I said yesterday, I believe I could live here forever and be satisfied."

"And I said that I would be very happy if you would remain here forever," she replied, looking at him with eyes that spoke the eager desire of her soul.

"Yes, I know you did, Titania," replied Jack, yielding to the infatuation that her personality threw around him with subtle power. "You wish me to remain, then?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Her limpid eyes dropped to the verdure-clad ground, and her bosom heaved with an emotion she could not repress.

"Can you not guess?" she asked, at length, raising her lovely eyes shyly to his face.

"I think I can," he said, stealing his arm around her waist. "You love me. Is it not so?"

"Yes," she answered, softly.

"And it would make you happy to become my wife—the queen of my heart?"

"Yes."

"Then, Titania, I will stay. I will give up all the world and everybody in it for your sake," he said, drawing her to him.

"Everybody?" she murmured. "Even this girl who has been as a sister to you?"

"You mean Nellie Rockwell? Of course, sweetheart. She has never been anything to me other than as a sister, nor does she care for me more than as a brother."

"Then I am yours, and I am very happy."

Their lips met in a long, sweet kiss, the first she had ever given to any one save her dead parents, and it sealed a love that to her, at least, was everything in the little world of which she was the chief part.

They passed an hour in their newly-born happiness, and then Titania said:

"Come, my husband and my king. You have acquired the right to enter and view the secret caves of my dominion."

She led the way behind the rocks around the pool and presently they stood before a low, tunnel-like entrance.

Entering, they soon came to an inner cave, lighted by several torches and peopled by six natives, who bowed profoundly before Titania.

She said something to them in the native tongue.

Three immediately seized torches from the walls and walked into a tunnel-like gallery.

Titania and Jack followed, while the other three natives came on behind.

They passed on from one cave to another until they reached one where the torch-bearers drew up in line, standing motionless as bronze statues.

The flickering light from the flambeaux only partly dispelled the darkness, but Jack could make out a stone shelf along two sides of the cave, and on this shelf he saw many bushel-baskets lined up at regular intervals.

"Behold the treasure of the secret caves!" said Titania, as the three natives, in obedience to her command, removed basket after basket, full of golden coin, from the shelf and displayed them before the astonished eyes of the boys.

Half an hour later Jack was telling Butch of the wonderful wealth of the secret caves.

"So you're going to marry Titania and become a young gold king?" said his chum.

"I am. It is decided, and Titania is now informing the three wise men of the village of her selection of a husband."

"Well, old man, I congratulate you, but will you tell me where do I come in in all this?"

"You! If you will agree to remain here with me, for a time, at any rate, I'll make you my prime minister and secretary of state."

"How much salary do I get? If I should leave later on I want to be well fixed. Money makes the mare go in the outside world."

"Never mind the salary. You can't spend any of it here. When you leave, if you ever do, I'll see that you carry a fortune away with you."

"It's a go, Jack, and there's my hand on it."

Three days later Jack Archer and Titania were married according to the simple ceremonies of the Titanians, and a feast was held at which there was great rejoicing.

Butch constituted himself a kind of master-of-the-cere-

monies, and though he couldn't make himself very well understood, he managed to acquire considerable popularity, and made quite an impression on several copper-faced beauties.

The young gold king and his prime minister continued to watch for the coming of the Golden Fleece, but they were disappointed, and as time went by they gave her up entirely, and settled down to a peaceful and easy existence on the island.

It was not until a year later that the boys learned why the ship did not hunt for them.

A vessel en route for San Francisco put in at Titania Island for water.

Jack Archer invited captain and crew to a special feast.

Then it was arranged that Butch Whitlock should go to the United States, with a box full of gold, and purchase a whole lot of things for the island colony, including a library of choice books, fine female apparel, a big American flag, and other articles too numerous to mention.

Almost the first person Butch met in San Francisco was Captain Rockwell.

The commander of the Golden Fleece was astonished to see him, for he thought he and Jack were dead.

Butch then learned that Richard Savage and the two sailors had not returned to Piqua, as he and Jack had supposed they did, although Nellie was brought back.

In fact, they never were heard of again, from which it was concluded that the schooner was lost somewhere at sea.

Butch had intended to charter a brig to carry his cargo to Titania Island, but, instead, he arranged to have the goods forwarded by the Golden Fleece on her next trip to Australia.

His story of Jack's marriage to the lovely queen of the island naturally surprised both Nellie and her father, and the girl determined to go off with the ship and pay Jack and his wife a visit.

The Golden Fleece arrived at Titania Island at a time of great rejoicing.

A baby prince had been born to the young gold king and Queen Titania.

Captain Rockwell and Nellie received a hearty welcome at the island, and Nellie was easily persuaded to remain there until her father touched at the place on his way home, four months afterward.

Under the management of Jack and Butch great improvements took place on the island, until in the course of years it became a most remarkable colony, and Jack never regretted that he gave up his sea career to become A Young Gold King and the virtual owner of the Treasure of the Secret Caves.

THE END.

Read "BOUND TO GET RICH; OR, HOW A WALL STREET BOY MADE MONEY," which will be the next number (118) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

The use of white clothing for the tropics, says Dr. L. W. Sambon, in the Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, has been adopted in imitation of native custom, and no doubt it is wise to follow the dictates of a long experience; but those who borrowed this custom overlooked the all-important fact that the native is already protected by a natural armor of pigment which is impervious to the harmful actinic rays. Having no reason to fear the chemical rays of the sun, the native dons an ample white robe, which, by reflecting the long heat rays, keeps him comfortably cool. White is for comfort, but health demands a lining of pigment. To avoid the additional weight and thickness of several layers of cloth, Dr. Sambon conceived the idea of a fabric composed of white and colored thread woven in such a way as to produce a warp or outer surface of white and a woof or inner surface of black, red, or orange. Such a cloth, with a heat-reflecting outer surface and an opaque inner layer, will, he thinks, meet all the requirements of comfort and protection for tropical use.

Experiments conducted by a German surgeon prove that blood poisoning may easily result from allowing conversation around an operation. He found that the minute drops of saliva expelled in the act of speaking contained on an average 173 bacteria, many of which are disease producers.

The force of example and a very striking exemplification in the case of two persons, a man and a woman, seen walking through Central Park, New York. Apparently they were husband and wife. He was painfully inching along, as though suffering from rheumatism, taking very short, spasmodic steps, and leaning heavily on the woman's arm, and she, although having every appearance of health and strength, moved her feet in exactly the same way. One comparatively long step and then a short jerk with the other foot. And thus they made their way along, keeping exact time, as though moved by an eccentric piece of machinery.

London is solving the transit problem of a great city by the use of motor omnibuses. Last year 60 of these buses, operated by twenty-five companies, carried 1,816,000 passengers in one day—for an average fare of a little more than a cent a ride. The Great railways of London carried 1,000,000 fewer passengers during the same period, and the best record of the New York subway is only about 540,000 passengers carried in one day. And this new and simple device for relieving traffic has earned from 7 to 10 per cent. a year on an investment of \$5,000,000. No American city has such a sensible system, says Harry W. Perry, in the World's Work, but the facts seem to show that the example of London and Paris could be followed by New York and Chicago and

other congested cities to the great convenience and comfort of the public and to the profit of the promoters. The advantages of the system are being increasingly appreciated. The owners have no heavy investment to make in rails or trolleys. The public convenience is better served, because the routes of the 'buses may be altered in an emergency to go around a blocked street or to meet the exceptional demand for transit over new routes on holidays. Ordinarily, these 'buses run over regular routes on schedules that in some cases assure a passenger that he will not have to wait more than ten minutes for a 'bus at any time of the day. And the city traffic problem is simplified by the fact that the motor 'buses occupy less space and carry more passengers than 'buses drawn by horses. The example of one company will show the financial success of the system and its service to the public. The gross receipts of the London Motor Omnibus Company, Ltd., the largest of the companies, for the eighteen months ending June 30, 1906, were \$624,690. This company alone carried considerably more than a million passengers a month for twenty-one months, without a single loss of life. At the first annual meeting of the company, held on October 22, 1906, a dividend of 10 per cent. was declared on the ordinary shares, after placing \$30,000 to reserve, allowing 20 per cent. for depreciation, and putting \$2,000 back into the business.

RIB TICKLERS.

A mistress said to her maid one day: "You must absolutely stop that perfectly awful habit, Sarah, of always trying to have the last word." "But how am I to know when you have nothing more to say?" answered Sarah.

It was clear that he was from the country. For several minutes he stood on the sidewalk, oblivious to the smiles and comments of passersby, gazing up at the top story of a tall trust company building across the way. Then he scratched his head and stroked his chin. "Wa-al," he muttered, "it may be all right, I suppose, but I might as well find out for sartin." He crossed the street, pushed his way into the trust company offices and approached the nearest window. The brass plate over it was inscribed "New Accounts." "Well?" asked the man behind the window without looking up from his ledger. "Wa-al," drawled the man from the country, "it may be all right an' correct, uv course; but while I wuz lookin' over—" "The bookkeeper'll fix that for you. Third window to the left." After slight hesitation the countryman doubtfully made his way over to the bookkeeper's window. "Well, sir, what can we do for you?" demanded the bookkeeper. "Nothin'. I don't know why they sent me over to you—I ain't got any account here. I wuz just wonderin' whether you happened to know—" "Information department," said the bookkeeper brusquely. "Sixth window to the right." The countryman started to say something, but the bookkeeper had resumed his writing. He walked over to the "information" window. "Say!" he opened up, without waiting for an invitation. "You folks needn't be so tarnation flossy. I jest wanted to tell yer durned old company that their—" "Complaint department. Last window, rear," growled the clerk. The countryman glared. For a moment he seemed undecided; then, his jaws set with determination, he strode down to the complaint window. "Well, what's the trouble with you?" demanded the complaint clerk. "Ain't none!" snapped the countryman. "I jest wanted to say to yer gosh-blamed old company that it appears to me as how their buildin' is—" But he got no further. "Fire! Fire! Fire!" came the cry from all parts of the building. Instantly everything became bustle and confusion. "Fire! fire!" "Hurry!" grunted the disgusted countryman as he followed the crowd out. "They'd a-knowed it a half an hour ago if they'd only listened to me."

"I planted some grass seed in the front yard and what do you suppose came up?" "Grass?" "Nope." "What then?" "A lot of birds came up and ate the seed."

THE EBONY CASKET

By Paul Braddon.

Glancing over the record of the various cases I have "piped," I find one case noted as that of the ebony casket.

The incidents of this case were brought to my notice at a time when house robberies were of almost nightly occurrence in the suburbs or the outlying villages.

The plunder consisted mostly of money, costly personal ornaments, and sometimes rich articles of clothing—in fact, of everything which was valuable and which the robbers could carry away easily and with the least chance of detection.

In several instances suspicion had been directed against different persons.

These persons had been shadowed, but without result; the perpetrators as yet remained undetected and unknown.

In view of these repeated raids, I was not surprised when a fresh theft was reported.

The latest reported victim was known as Mrs. Colonel Waldron, or the "Duchess Dollie," as she was sometimes called by her admirers.

She was a woman of magnificent appearance—large and queenly of figure, with handsome and haughty features, and was supposed to be a foreigner.

She dressed superbly, was reputed to be enormously wealthy, and resided in an elegantly appointed house at the upper end of the city. But little more than that was known about her.

The eventful ebony casket was her property, and she had reported it missing with its contents of almost priceless jewels.

It was not the Duchess Dollie, however, who enlisted me in the case; it was a young gentleman whom rumor whispered was matrimonially engaged to the magnificent widow—for such she was declared to be.

Ray Rosbry—for so we shall speak of this young gentleman—presented himself in my office the day of the casket's disappearance.

"The lady has no doubts as to the thief; but I am sure she is mistaken; and it is to save two innocent persons from life-long disgrace that I wish you to take hold of the case," he said to me.

It was evident Ray Rosbry was in the deepest distress and uncertainty, and my interest was excited at once.

"I infer the Duchess Dollie accuses these two persons. Who are they?"

"The name is Maynard; they are brother and sister. He is but a mere youth and has been the lady's footman; Kate has been employed in the house as sewing girl."

"So they are no longer in the house?"

"They were both informed yesterday that their services were no longer required. It was after they had gone, after Katie's trunk was taken away this morning, that madame—the Duchess Dollie—discovered the ebony casket was missing."

"What was the cause of discharge?"

The question seemed to disconcert Ray Rosbry.

His good-looking face colored, and he stirred uneasily.

"The lady takes unaccountable likes and dislikes sometimes," he answered evasively.

"What steps has she taken to recover the missing ebony casket?"

Rosbry's flushed face paled before he replied:

"She has sent a warrant—a warrant for search and arrest—after Katie."

"If nothing is found the girl can't be held."

"But the shame and terror of having her effects searched will distract the poor girl. Can you not prevent, or at least delay, that measure?"

"What interest have you in the matter—in this girl, Rosbry?"

"I know she is guiltless—I would stake my life on it. And, I am not unwilling to admit, I love her," was his manly reply.

"Rumor has engaged you to Duchess Dollie."

"Rumor lies, then. I would as soon think of engaging myself to Jezebel."

After a little further conversation, I promised to investigate the case. And as I had no urgent business at hand, I started at once.

My first move was to call upon Duchess Dollie; but the lady happened not to be at home, and in some disappointment, I left the elegant house.

There was a small park directly opposite—a place which had once been a picnic resort, but which was now abandoned to whoever might choose to stroll through it.

To cross it would materially shorten the distance to the car which I proposed taking to the home of the Maynards, farther down town, and I naturally took that way.

Half way across I heard low tones cautiously speaking, and saw through the trees two dark forms—those of a man and a woman.

It was already late dusk, and I could distinguish nothing of their features nor dress; but I detected at once that they were no ordinary passers-by.

They had met there for some secret interview, and their subject of discussion even then was their own safety.

"We can't be too cautious. But it was a smart dodge, if it works," the man was saying, with a coarse chuckle.

"He wanted to know too much. I had to get rid of him. He is far too cunning to make a stir which might bring suspicion upon himself," was the woman's answer, in harsh though wary tones.

"But what of the other?"

"With the other it is for revenge."

"Then there will be a stir anyhow. Revenge don't pay when there are secrets to be kept."

As he spoke the woman threw out her hands with a gesture of fierce impatience.

The movement displaced the long cloak she wore, and I had a fleeting glimpse of costly satin and of glittering jewels.

At the same instant her companion turned with a sweeping glance about them.

Instinctively I stepped from within the range of his searching eyes.

A twig snapped beneath my feet, and with a menacing snarl he started toward the spot where I had halted.

The single step I had taken from the spot possibly saved my life.

The snarl had scarcely broken from the man's lips before he sent a bullet whizzing through the air, and the missile of death pierced the trunk of a tree against which I had second before been leaning.

I was totally unprepared for any bravado of that sort, and I lost a precious half minute before I had recovered from my astonishment sufficiently to draw my own revolver and make myself ready for the threatened encounter.

But no encounter occurred.

As I waited watchfully on the defensive I heard the woman's imperative remonstrance.

I saw the fellow wheel abruptly, and then their rapid footsteps sounded in the scramble of a hasty retreat.

To pursue them I considered but a waste of important time; therefore I went my way, boarded a down-town car, and twenty minutes later rang the bell of the humble Maynard residence.

No one seemed to notice my ring, and as I waited for admittance the door was pulled suddenly and hurriedly open by a young man, in whom I recognized a court officer.

The fatal warrants had been served.

I had no authority to interfere if I had arrived earlier, but nevertheless I felt keenly disappointed.

I should have liked to get Katie's and her brother's version of the difficulty before they had been terrified possibly into damaging admissions.

Our recognition was mutual.

"Hello!" exclaimed the young man, looking relieved as well as surprised, "I am glad you happened along. I am

Having a job I can't manage single-handed—a girl in hysterics, and a boy raging like a Comanche."

"You didn't find any stolen property?"

"Didn't I? I found twenty V's in the boy's valise, and Duchess Dollie's ebony casket was in the girl's trunk."

He had stepped back into the lighted hall.

As I followed him I noticed he had the caskēt—an oblong box of rather common manufacture—under one arm.

He held it toward me as if to convince me of what I seemed to doubt.

As I opened it and glanced at the contents I could not restrain an exclamation:

"By all that is wonderful; look at this watch, will you? Look at this ruby necklace! Do you think Duchess Dollie will claim the ownership of these trinkets?"

"By Jove! she will be a fool if she does!"

For a moment we stared at each other in silence.

The watch and the ruby necklace were beyond the possibility of a doubt part of the described plunder taken from a suburban mansion in one of the recent mysterious house robberies.

"You can defer the arrest of Katie Maynard and her brother."

"I should be hauled up before the commissioners for neglect of duty."

"I will take the responsibility. I want you to go after the owners of these articles. They must be brought down to identify their property."

While we were discussing the situation in low voices we could hear Katie's bitter weeping in an adjoining room, and see the youth, Johnny, eyeing us with considerable boyish defiance, mingled with manly indignation.

"You'll have to carry me or take me dead, if you take me at all," he declared from behind a broad table where he had barricaded himself. "I don't know nothing about the things."

"How did the money get in your valise, Johnny?"

The youth shrugged his strong well-made shoulders.

"Somebody wants to get rid of us, I reckon. I saw too much and heard too much, maybe."

I started.

The words were almost identical with those I had heard spoken in the little park a short time before.

Who was the woman who played a "smart dodge" to rid herself of a party wanting to know too much?

And who was that woman's companion—the reckless scoundrel who had sent a bullet flying after me in the dark?

What was the secret between them?—was it robbery? Was the man one of the mysterious house-breakers and the woman a police?

While I was pondering over these questions, we had settled the present unpleasant matter.

The arrest of the Maynards was to be deferred until I had made a few further investigations of the case.

It was necessary I should consult Duchess Dollie; if the Maynards were not guilty there was no reason why she would not cheerfully withdraw the charge.

And besides, if she could explain the mystery of the watch and necklace, I might obtain an important clue to the perpetrators of the recent daring robberies.

My investigations the next day resulted in fixing the identity of the fellow who had sent a bullet after me in the park.

I traced him step by step to his lodgings in an obscure quarter, by means which are familiar to all detectives. I succeeded in learning what his resorts and who his companions were.

He was a gamester sport known as Jem Holburne, and had long been regarded by the police as a suspicious character.

In the meantime the watch and necklace had been identified by the rightful owners.

It was about the dinner hour when I presented myself at Duchess Dollie's elegant house.

The untrained servant who had been installed in Johnny Maynard's place admitted me to the drawing-room.

"The mistress would be down presently," he said.

But the lady was already down, and so close that I could

have touched her as she stood just beyond a partly drawn portiere.

She was not alone. Ray Rosbry was with her, and the two were engaged in an extremely animated conversation.

The magnificent widow was obviously in a terrible passion.

"I can't understand why you wish to press such a charge without giving the poor girl a chance to prove her innocence," Rosbry was saying.

The young gentleman was visibly distressed, and was pleading for poor Katie right manfully.

"To prove her a thief is my revenge. It is my vengeance upon her for coming between you and me," Duchess Dollie almost shrieked, her handsome features distorted by jealous fury.

"My dear madam," Rosbry began.

But I quietly interrupted the discussion.

"Pardon the intrusion," I said, as I pushed aside the hangings and stepped into view. "Will the lady inform me if she has, or had, two ebony caskets?"

The Duchess Dollie stepped back haughtily.

"I decline to answer," she said, with lips as suddenly white as ashes.

"You need not do so then. Are you ready to state that the contents of the casket you claim as stolen was your own property?"

"Certainly. It contained a diamond set I had only recently bought at Setters & Gravers."

"You are laboring under a mistake, madam. The diamond set is in the casket you have in your possession. The ebony casket you placed in Katie Maynard's trunk contained stolen property, which has been identified by the rightful owners."

The woman tottered back as if fainting.

"The bills you placed in Johnny Maynard's valise were also stolen money. They were marked, and have also been identified. Your 'smart dodge' didn't work, madam; it not only failed, but led to the detection of Jem Holburne as a burglar without a loophole to escape conviction. And now it is my duty to arrest you as his accomplice—a receiver of stolen goods."

The woman staggered back and reached a shaking hand among the various articles on a table near her.

Before Rosbry or myself could divine her purpose, she had snatched a vial from a little gilded box and swallowed the contents to the last drop.

"You are cheated of your prisoner; all the doctors in the city can't save me," she said, with a horrible smile as she dropped convulsively into her chair.

An hour later the woman was dead.

Jem Holburne was tried and convicted as the perpetrator of the mysterious burglaries, and is now serving out his sentence.

The Maynards were exonerated of all suspicion, and Katie is now the wife of Ray Rosbry, who is a young merchant of good position.

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